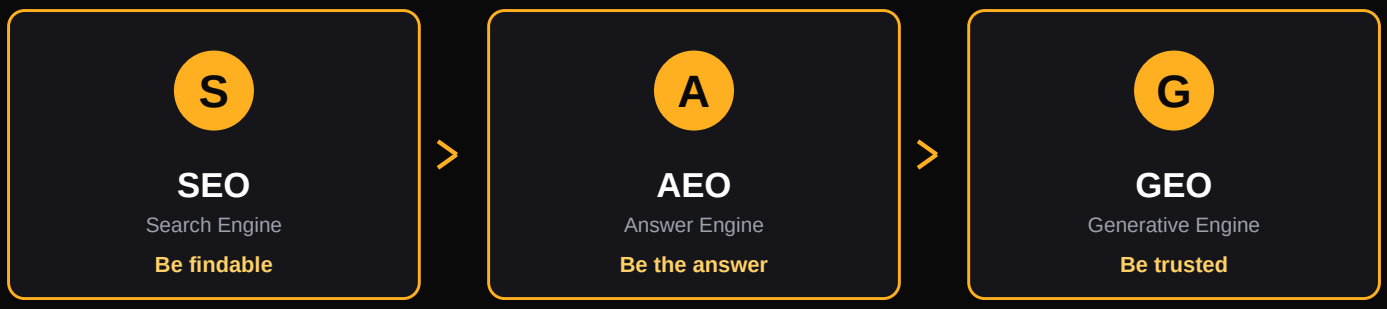
PLAYBOOK · JULY 2026

The GAS Engine Playbook

How to get your business found on Google **and** recommended by ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Perplexity — written for US real estate and construction owners.



Every statistic in this playbook is sourced and dated. Where the evidence is weak or contested, we say so — including where it contradicts what most agencies are selling right now.

THE PROBLEM

Your customers didn't leave Google. They added a second front door.

You have probably been told that search is dying and everyone has moved to ChatGPT. That is not what the data shows, and a playbook built on it would waste your money. Here is what actually changed.

Half of US adults now use AI chatbots — mostly to look things up

49% of US adults use AI chatbots, up from 33% a year earlier. 44% have used ChatGPT specifically. Among chatbot users, **searching for information is the single most common use**, at 42%.

Pew Research Center, “Americans and AI 2026” (June 2026). Probability-based panel, n=5,119.

When an AI answer appears, half the clicks disappear

Pew tracked 68,879 real Google searches from 900 US adults. When Google showed an AI summary, users clicked a result on just 8% of searches — versus 15% when no summary appeared.

Clicks roughly halve.

Only 1% of users clicked a link inside the AI summary itself. 26% ended their session without visiting any site at all.

Pew Research Center, July 2025

Independent studies by Ahrefs, Seer Interactive and Amsive found the same direction at different magnitudes. Google disputes the finding but has published no data of its own.

The honest version: this is redistribution, not collapse

Google search volume hit an all-time high in Q1 2026 and Search revenue grew 19% year over year, while AI platforms send roughly **0.6%** of the referral traffic Google does. Anyone telling you to abandon Google SEO in 2026 is wrong on the numbers.

What changed is not *where* people search. It is that a search now has to **name you** to be worth anything.

REALITY CHECK 1 OF 2

Real estate: AI joined the research, not the hiring decision

MYTH	“Sellers ask ChatGPT and Gemini now. Nobody is on Zillow or Google anymore.”
REALITY	In 2025, **91% of home sellers used an agent** and **66% found that agent through a referral or repeat business**. Zillow's traffic **grew 6%** that year. Only **20%** of prospective buyers and homeowners used an AI tool for homebuying research in the past year — and mostly to understand the process, not to pick who to hire.
THE POINT	AI has entered the research phase. It has not yet touched the hiring decision — but the portals themselves have started treating it as a real threat. **That gap is the opportunity, and it will not stay open.**

NAR Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers 2025 (n=6,103, ±1.25%); Zillow Group 10-K filed Feb 2026; Bank of America Homebuyer Insights 2026 (Sparks Research, n=2,000) — that 20% is drawn from a broad base of homeowners and future buyers, so read it as directional.

What the portals told their own investors

The most credible signal is not a survey — it is what these companies are legally obliged to disclose to shareholders. Both added AI-search language to their annual filings that simply was not there the year before.

Zillow, FY2025 annual report (new language, absent in FY2024)

“Emerging AI-based search, recommendation, and assistant tools **may** change how consumers discover, evaluate, or transact in residential real estate, **potentially reducing traffic** to traditional online real estate platforms.”

News Corp (Realtor.com's parent), FY2025 annual report

Generative AI chatbots and search overviews “**have, and may continue to, reduce traffic** to, and subscriber demand for, the Company's digital products.”

Note the tense. Zillow says *may*. News Corp says **have** — that is a disclosure of damage already done.

REALITY CHECK 2 OF 2

Construction & trades: the lead marketplaces are already moving

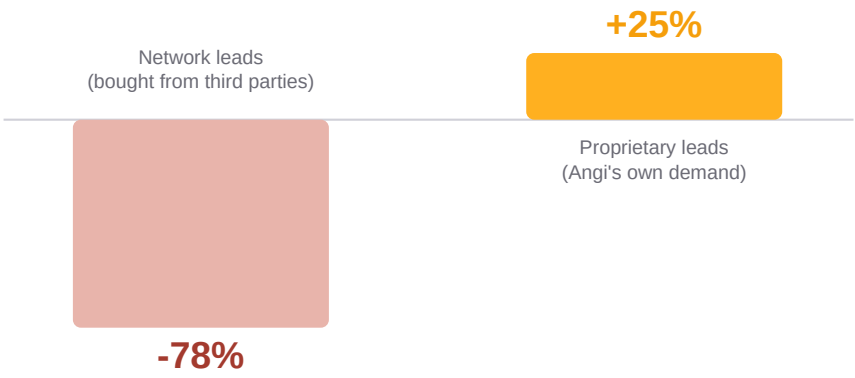
If you buy leads from a marketplace, this page matters more to you than any other in the playbook. The companies that sell you those leads are repositioning around AI right now — and their own numbers are public.

~15%
of Yelp's Request-a-Quote projects came through Yelp Assistant, its AI
Yelp Q1 2026 shareholder letter

Mar 2026
Angi launched an app inside ChatGPT — buying placement where buyers ask
Angi Inc., 4 March 2026

-13%
Angi revenue, FY2025, as bought-in lead volume fell away underneath it
Angi Inc. FY2025 results

Angi's two lead channels went in opposite directions



Angi, Q4 2025 YoY

Bought-in lead volume collapsed while Angi's own demand grew. Revenue fell 13% for FY2025.

Angi Inc. FY2025 results

Read this one carefully — it is not purely an AI story

A large part of the Network collapse is Angi's own doing: in January 2025 they introduced “homeowner choice,” which deliberately cut the third-party lead resale that Network depended on. Anyone showing you this chart as proof that “AI killed Angi” is overselling it.

What it does show is that the marketplaces are now competing for the buyer's first question rather than reselling the click afterwards — and Angi paying to sit inside ChatGPT is the clearest evidence of where they think that question now gets asked.

One honest gap: there is **no credible survey** of how US homeowners actually choose a contractor by channel — not from Angi, Houzz, Harvard's housing centre or the Census. Any deck quoting “X% of homeowners find contractors by referral” is citing something that does not exist. We would rather tell you that than invent a number.

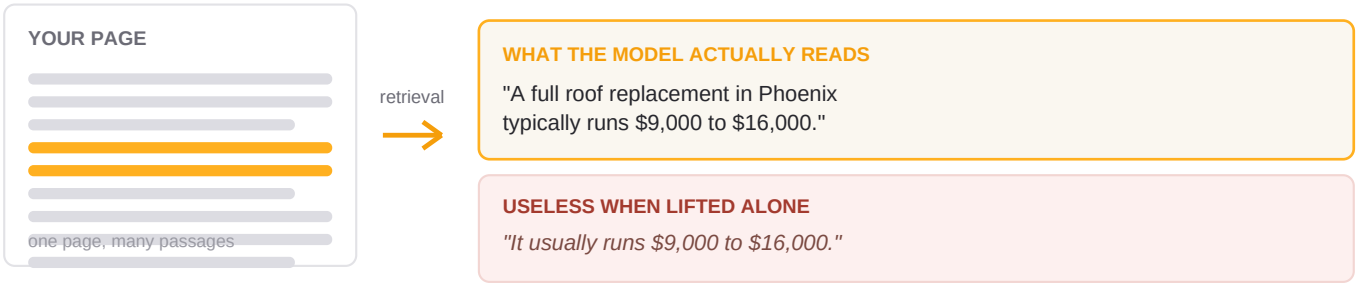
THE MECHANISM

How an AI decides who to recommend

Almost every worthwhile tactic in this playbook follows from two facts about how these systems actually work. Understand these and the action pages will make sense rather than feeling like a checklist.

Fact 1 — AI reads passages, not pages

An AI does not read your page the way a person does. It retrieves short fragments, pulled out and handed to the model without the surrounding page. Google's own grounding tools return these as discrete “chunks” mapped to individual sentences. A paragraph that depends on the one above it becomes meaningless the moment it is lifted out.



Illustrative example only — the dollar figures are made up to show sentence construction, not to quote a market rate.

Fact 2 — trust is assembled from three layers

Being quotable gets you into the answer. Being *trusted* gets you named as the recommendation. That trust is built from what other sources say about you, and you control the layers unequally.

1. FOUNDATION — You control this — fix it first
Server-rendered pages an AI crawler can actually read

2. VALIDATION — You earn this — highest leverage
Google Business Profile, reviews, consistent listings

3. AMPLIFICATION — Earned slowly — never faked
Mentions on sites, forums and press the models read

ENGINE 1 OF 3 · ACTIONS

SEO — be findable

Why this still matters, including for AI

AI answers are mostly assembled from pages that already rank. Your classic SEO is not a separate project from your AI visibility — it is the input to it. Google states it directly: “optimizing for generative AI search is optimizing for the search experience, and thus still SEO.”

Do these, in this order

- **Check you are actually indexed.** Search **site:yourdomain.com** on Google. That is every page Google has. Missing pages cannot rank, cannot be cited by an AI, and cannot earn you anything. Ten seconds, and it is the most common problem we find on real estate and contractor sites.
- **One page per service, per city you serve.** A single “Services” page cannot rank for nine different jobs in four different towns.
- **Write the page for the question, not the keyword.** Title it the way a customer would ask it out loud.
- **Fix what is technically broken before adding anything.** Slow pages, broken links and pages Google never indexed cost you more than any new content would earn you.
- **Earn links from local and industry sources** — suppliers, trade bodies, the chamber of commerce, local press. Never buy them.
- **Keep name, address and phone identical everywhere.** Inconsistency here quietly undermines every other thing on this list.

ENGINE 2 OF 3 · ACTIONS

AEO — be the answer

The whole idea in one line

SEO competes for a spot on a page of ten links. **AEO competes to be the sentence the AI actually says back, with your name in it.**

Do these

- **Answer first, then explain.** Open every section with a complete 1–3 sentence answer. Expand underneath it.
- **Make every paragraph survive on its own.** Name the subject every time — an extracted fragment has no “it” to refer back to.
- **Write headings as the customer's actual question.** “How much does a roof replacement cost in Phoenix?” beats “Pricing.”
- **Use lists and tables.** Microsoft states plainly that walls of text “blur ideas together” and make extraction harder.
- **Never hide answers in tabs or accordions.** AI systems often do not render collapsed content — your pricing and FAQs must be visible on load.
- **Publish real numbers from your own jobs.** A specific, verifiable figure is quotable. “We work fast” is not.

The single edit that matters most

Before — useless once extracted

“It usually runs between nine and sixteen thousand, depending on the factors above.”

After — survives being lifted out alone

“A full roof replacement in Phoenix typically runs $9,000 to $16,000.”

Illustrative example — the figures demonstrate sentence construction and are not a market quote. Use your own real numbers.

ENGINE 3 OF 3 · ACTIONS

GEO — be trusted

AI does not replace your Google Business Profile and your reviews — **it reads them**. In one 2026 survey of AI users, 88% said they fact-check AI recommendations and 97% cross-reference review platforms before acting.

BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026, n=1,002. Single-vendor survey, not independently replicated — treat the exact figures as directional.

Do these

- **Confirm an AI can physically read your site.** Right-click, View Page Source, and search for a sentence from your page. If it is not there, your content is built by JavaScript — and the major AI crawlers do not run JavaScript. Nothing else on this page matters until this passes.
- **Complete every field of your Google Business Profile.** Categories, service area, every service with a description, photos monthly. This is your business's resume as far as an AI is concerned.
- **Ask every satisfied customer for a review.** Nothing else you can do this month moves GEO further.
- **Verify your site in Bing Webmaster Tools.** Free, and it reports actual AI citation counts — and ChatGPT's search leans on Bing's index.

What most playbooks are selling you — and what the evidence says

Schema markup is not the AI unlock. The best causal study to date tracked 1,885 pages that added schema against 4,000 matched control pages. AI citations moved by roughly nothing — and *fell* 4.6% in AI Overviews. Google states outright: “Structured data isn't required for generative AI search.” Google also retired FAQ rich results in May 2026.

Add schema anyway — it is free, takes an hour, and genuinely helps classic Search. Just do not let anyone bill you for it as the thing that gets you into ChatGPT. Anyone quoting “2.5x more citations with schema” is repeating a number with no traceable study behind it.

Ahrefs difference-in-differences study, May 2026; Google Search Central AI optimization guide, updated July 2026.

YOUR NEXT 30 DAYS

Start here. All of it is free.

Ordered by impact. If you only get through week one, you will still be ahead of most of your competitors.

Week 1 — Make sure you can be read

- [ ] Search site:yourdomain.com and confirm your key pages are indexed
- [ ] View Page Source and confirm your text is in the HTML, not built by JavaScript
- [ ] Check robots.txt allows GPTBot, OAI-SearchBot, ClaudeBot, PerplexityBot

Week 2 — Claim your ground

- [ ] Complete every field on your Google Business Profile
- [ ] Verify your site in Bing Webmaster Tools and submit your sitemap
- [ ] Make your name, address and phone identical across every listing

Week 3 — Answer the real questions

- [ ] List the 15 questions customers actually ask you before they buy
- [ ] Answer 10 of them on your site, answer-first, one question per heading
- [ ] Move any pricing or FAQ content out of tabs and accordions

Week 4 — Build the proof

- [ ] Ask your last 10 happy customers for a review
- [ ] Publish one page with real numbers from your own jobs
- [ ] Ask ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini who they recommend in your area — twice each

Where you stand today

SCORE YOURSELF — ONE POINT PER YES	YES	NO
Every page I care about shows up in a site: search	☐	☐
My page text is visible in View Page Source	☐	☐
My Google Business Profile is 100% complete	☐	☐
I have collected a review in the last 30 days	☐	☐
My site answers the questions customers actually ask	☐	☐
My name, address and phone match on every listing	☐	☐
I have checked what ChatGPT says when asked about my area	☐	☐

0–2 yes: you are effectively invisible to AI search — start at week 1. **3–5:** the foundation is there; the gap is proof and answers. **6–7:** you are ahead of most of your market — now go compound it.

TOOLS & NEXT STEP

The only tools you need to start

All free. Set them up in this order — Bing first, because it is the only one that reports real AI citation counts.

FREE TOOL	WHAT IT GIVES YOU
Bing Webmaster Tools bing.com/webmasters	The strongest free AI tool available: real citation counts from Copilot and Bing AI answers.
Google Search Console search.google.com/search-console	Indexing status, plus a new AI performance report showing impressions in AI Overviews and AI Mode.
Google Business Profile business.google.com	The local record AI assistants check before recommending.
Rich Results Test search.google.com/test/rich-results	Validates your schema in seconds.

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Saif Ahmed

Founder, DaxReach

10+ years running back-office operations for US real estate businesses.

- Scaled a US bookkeeping firm to 100+ clients, mostly real estate
- QuickBooks Certified ProAdvisor
- Runs Bangalore Entrepreneur Network — 7,800+ members
- Founder, Solopreneurs Lab Bangalore — 2,356 members

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