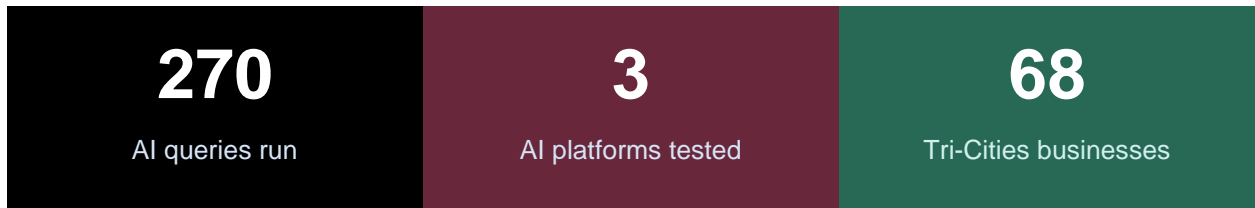




## **2026 TRI-CITIES AI SEARCH VISIBILITY STUDY**

### **Home Services Edition**

HVAC · Plumbing · Electrical · Roofing · Tree Service



Published June 2026 · 1-FIND SERVICES · Johnson City, TN

1-find.agency · 423-930-8134 · contact@1-find.agency

## Executive Summary

In spring 2026, 1-FIND SERVICES conducted a systematic study of AI search visibility across the Tri-Cities market — Johnson City, Kingsport, and Bristol, Tennessee. The study asked a straightforward question: when a homeowner uses an AI platform to find a local contractor, which Tri-Cities businesses actually get recommended, and why?

We ran 270 standardized queries across three platforms — ChatGPT with web search, Perplexity, and Google AI Overviews — covering five home service industries: HVAC, plumbing, electrical, roofing, and tree service. Each query was run three times to measure consistency. We then cross-referenced the results against our companion 2026 Tri-Cities Home Services Digital Visibility Study, which documents the website technical health and Google Business Profile data for 68 businesses operating in the market.

The headline finding has two parts. First, exactly half of the 68 businesses in our study — 34 companies — were mentioned by at least one AI platform. The other half were invisible. Second, Google's AI Overviews did not generate a single local business recommendation across all 135 Google queries. For every home service query we tested, Google served the local pack, local service ads, or organic listings — not an AI-generated answer.

The most consistent predictor of AI visibility was review count, not schema or website health. Businesses with 100 or more Google reviews were mentioned at a rate of 69–79 percent. Businesses with fewer than 20 reviews were mentioned just 11 percent of the time. The average business mentioned by AI had 394 Google reviews; the average business that was not mentioned had 72.

These findings have direct implications for how home service businesses in the Tri-Cities should prioritize their digital marketing investments in 2026.

## Key Findings

### Finding 1: Google does not use AI to answer local contractor queries

Across 135 queries run through Google Search in an incognito browser session, Google generated zero AI Overviews for any home service query in the Tri-Cities market. Every query was answered with the local service ads pack, the organic local 3-pack, or standard organic results. For businesses competing on local search, the implication is clear: Google ranking and GBP optimization remain the primary channel, not AI Overview visibility.

### Finding 2: Half of Tri-Cities home service businesses are invisible to AI

**34 of 68 businesses** in the study (50%) were not mentioned by either ChatGPT or Perplexity across 270 queries. Of the 34 businesses that were mentioned, 20 appeared on both platforms — a meaningful signal of durable AI visibility.

### Finding 3: Review count is the strongest predictor of AI visibility

The correlation between review count and AI mention rate is the most consistent finding in the study:

Review Count	AI Mention Rate	Sample (mentioned / total)
200+ reviews	<b>69%</b>	9 of 13
100–199 reviews	<b>79%</b>	11 of 14
50–99 reviews	50%	6 of 12
20–49 reviews	38%	6 of 16
Fewer than 20	11%	1 of 9

Businesses with 100–199 reviews had the highest mention rate at 79%. The sharp drop below 50 reviews — from 50% to 38% to 11% — suggests a meaningful threshold in the 50–100 review range.

### Finding 4: GBP completeness matters more than website health

**AI-mentioned businesses averaged a GBP health score of 86.9** compared to 78.0 for businesses not mentioned — a gap of nearly 9 points. Website health scores showed almost no

difference (66.7 vs 63.8). This suggests AI platforms pull primarily from GBP and web-indexed content rather than rewarding technical website optimization.

### Finding 5: Schema has no measurable independent effect on AI visibility

Businesses with LocalBusiness schema were mentioned 49% of the time. Businesses without it were mentioned 52% of the time — essentially no difference. However, businesses with schema had an average of 357 Google reviews, while businesses without schema averaged just 104. Schema adoption and review count are correlated, making it difficult to isolate schema's independent contribution from the data in this study.

### Finding 6: HVAC is the most AI-visible industry; roofing is the least

Industry	Mention Rate	Mentioned	Avg Reviews (Mentioned)	Avg Reviews (Not Mentioned)
HVAC	71%	10/14	658	26
Electrical	50%	6/12	279	64
Plumbing	50%	6/12	621	106
Tree Service	47%	7/15	64	95
Roofing	33%	5/15	129	50

The HVAC industry's high mention rate reflects a small number of companies with very high review counts — several HVAC businesses in the study have 500–1,200+ reviews. Roofing showed the lowest mention rate and the narrowest gap between mentioned and not-mentioned review averages, suggesting the roofing category is more competitive at the mid-review tier.

### Finding 7: Perplexity provides more specific and locally-grounded answers than ChatGPT

Perplexity consistently named specific local businesses with citations to their websites, Google Business Profiles, and local directory listings. ChatGPT with web search also named local businesses but with more variance between runs — the same query often returned different businesses on different runs, suggesting weaker anchoring to a single authoritative local source. Both platforms hedged with language like “I recommend checking recent reviews,” but Perplexity more frequently provided actionable local specifics.

## Most AI-Visible Businesses

The following businesses appeared on both ChatGPT and Perplexity, earning the highest AI Visibility Score in the study (55/100). Score components: ChatGPT mention (20 pts), Perplexity mention (20 pts), cross-platform consistency bonus (15 pts). Google AI Overviews contributed 0 points for all businesses.

Business	ChatGPT Mentions	Perplexity Mentions	Industry
Steve Huff Plumbing, Heating & Air	6	19	Plumbing/HVAC
Austin's Plumbing LLC	8	11	Plumbing
Stateline Services	7	9	Multi-trade
Rowan Tree Care	4	12	Tree Service
Pink Duck Plumbing	7	5	Plumbing
Hometown Plumbing, Electrical & HVAC	2	10	Multi-trade
Thompson Electrical Service	3	8	Electrical
Vanderpool Roofing LLC	6	5	Roofing
TriCities Electric	2	7	Electrical
Precision Electrical Company	2	7	Electrical

# What Local Businesses Can Learn

The data from this study points to three practical priorities for home service businesses in the Tri-Cities market that want to improve their AI search visibility.

## 1. Build review volume before optimizing anything else

The review count threshold is the clearest finding in this study. If a business has fewer than 50 Google reviews, its chance of appearing in an AI recommendation is low regardless of its website quality or schema implementation. The data suggests 100 reviews as a meaningful floor, with the 100–199 band showing the highest mention rate at 79%.

This does not mean gaming review counts or using prohibited practices. It means having an active, consistent process for asking satisfied customers to leave reviews, responding to existing reviews, and resolving negative ones. For most businesses in this study, review velocity — consistently earning new reviews over time — is a higher priority than any technical fix.

## 2. Treat your Google Business Profile as a primary asset

AI-mentioned businesses averaged a GBP health score nearly 9 points higher than businesses that were not mentioned. A complete GBP — with current hours, a verified website, a specific primary category, and regular posts — is one of the primary sources AI platforms use when building local recommendations. An incomplete or neglected GBP is a direct barrier to AI visibility.

The category selection matters specifically. Businesses with trade-specific categories ("Plumber," "HVAC Contractor," "Electrician") outperformed those with generic categories ("Home Improvement," "Contractor"). Choosing the most specific available category for your primary trade is a free, immediate action.

## 3. Understand what Google AI Overviews does and does not do

For home service queries, Google is not using AI-generated answers. It is serving the local pack, local service ads, and organic listings. This means traditional local SEO — GBP optimization, local citations, on-page geo-signals, and website technical health — remains the primary lever for Google visibility in this category.

This may change. Google has been expanding AI Overviews coverage and the home service category may see AI-generated answers in the future. Businesses that build strong GBP profiles and review volumes now are better positioned for that transition when it occurs.

# Methodology

## Study Design

The 2026 Tri-Cities AI Search Visibility Study queried three AI platforms with standardized local home service search queries and recorded which businesses, if any, each platform recommended. The study covered five industries — HVAC, plumbing, electrical, roofing, and tree service — across three Tri-Cities markets: Johnson City TN, Kingsport TN, and Bristol TN.

## Query Design

Three query templates were used for each industry-city combination, representing different search intents: 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?"). This produced 45 unique queries (3 templates × 5 industries × 3 cities). Each query was run three times per platform to measure response consistency.

## Platforms

ChatGPT (GPT-4o with web search enabled, accessed via chatgpt.com), Perplexity (default model with live web search), and Google AI Overviews (incognito Chrome browser, Johnson City TN geolocation). All queries were run within a two-week window in May–June 2026 to minimize model update variance.

## Cross-Reference Dataset

AI mention results were matched against the 2026 Tri-Cities Home Services Digital Visibility Study, which audited website technical health, structured data implementation, and Google Business Profile completeness for 68 unique businesses operating in the market. Businesses serving multiple industries were deduplicated by name for the cross-reference analysis.

## Scoring

AI Visibility Score (0–100): ChatGPT mention (20 pts), Perplexity mention (20 pts), Google AI Overview mention (30 pts), cross-platform bonus for two or more platforms (15 pts). Maximum attainable score given the Google AI Overview finding was 55.

## Limitations

**Point-in-time snapshot.** AI responses change as models update and as local business data changes. Results captured during this study may not reflect current AI behavior.

**Response variance.** AI platforms do not return deterministic results. Three runs per query captured some variance but not the full distribution of possible responses.

**Correlation only.** The relationships identified between review count, GBP health, and AI visibility are correlational. The study does not establish causation.

**Business name extraction.** AI responses were processed using automated pattern matching to extract business names, followed by manual review. Some mentions may have been missed or miscounted.

**Market scope.** The study covers the Tri-Cities market only. 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, Answer Engine Optimization (AEO), web design, and business automation. 1-FIND SERVICES is a member of the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce and a TechBehemoths Award recipient.

1-find.agency · 423-930-8134 · [contact@1-find.agency](mailto:contact@1-find.agency)