

• WHITE PAPER

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Invisible Business

Why your business exists in the real world but not in AI. A framework for understanding AI visibility.

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PUBLISHED

May 2026
Preliminary Edition

• EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most small businesses are invisible to AI.

Not because they lack quality, reputation, or customers, but because AI platforms cannot find, parse, or accurately represent them. As AI-powered tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini become the primary way consumers and professionals discover businesses, a gap has opened between who your business actually is and what AI says about you.

For the majority of small businesses, AI either says nothing at all or says something wrong. Both outcomes cost you customers.

This paper introduces the **Signal Strength framework** and the **six dimensions of AI visibility**, a diagnostic lens for understanding where your business stands and what's at stake.

• AT A GLANCE

800M

Weekly active users on ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2026)

25%

Projected decline in traditional search engine volume by end of 2026 (Gartner, 2026)

800%

Year-over-year growth in AI referral traffic (Semrush, 2025)

14%

Average conversion rate from AI-referred traffic, vs ~3% for traditional organic search (Previsible, 2025–26)

• PRELIMINARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

What 20 small businesses revealed about AI visibility.

To test the Signal Strength framework against real-world conditions, Signal & Structure AI analyzed 20 small businesses across four industries and four U.S. cities. The businesses represent common local service categories: chiropractic practices, pilates studios, independent realtors, and bed and breakfasts. Cities included Atlanta, Raleigh, Austin, and Chicago.

Each business was evaluated against three major AI platforms: ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini. Businesses are presented without identifying information to protect their privacy; none were clients of Signal & Structure AI at the time of evaluation. Scores reflect the state of each business at the time of testing in early 2026.

What the data showed

Not one business in the study reached Strong Signal. The highest score recorded was 57 out of 100. The lowest was 33. The mean across all 20 businesses was 49.7, placing the group at the boundary between Low Signal and Weak Signal.

That result holds across industry and geography. A chiropractic practice in Atlanta and a bed and breakfast in Chicago scored within a few points of each other. The pattern is structural.

The Technical Health paradox

Most businesses scored near-perfect on Technical Health, the category that measures how accessible a website is to AI crawlers. Their sites were technically readable. Yet overall scores remained in the 33 to 57 range. **Technical accessibility is not AI discoverability.**

Structured Data: the universal weakness

Across all 20 businesses and all four industries, Structured Data was the lowest-scoring category without exception. No business scored above 48 out of 100 on this dimension, and the category average was 25. This is the markup that tells AI exactly what a business is, who runs it, what it offers, and where it operates. Without it, AI has to infer. Most of the time, it infers wrong or says nothing.

• THE DATASET

Twenty businesses, four industries, four cities.

Scores are on a 0–100 scale. **Structured Data** measures schema markup quality. **Business Identity** measures name, address, and phone consistency. **AI Presence** measures whether AI platforms found and accurately described the business. Businesses are anonymized.

BUSINESS TYPE	CITY	SCORE	STRUCTURED DATA	BUSINESS IDENTITY	AI PRESENCE
CHIROPRACTIC PRACTICES					
Chiropractic practice	Atlanta	56	20	60	100
Chiropractic practice	Atlanta	33	25	30	100
Chiropractic practice	Austin	51	10	35	100
Chiropractic practice	Raleigh	50	25	25	100
Chiropractic practice	Chicago	54	25	50	100
PILATES STUDIOS					
Pilates studio	Atlanta	39	10	35	56
Pilates studio	Raleigh	57	25	70	100
Pilates studio	Raleigh	56	25	70	100
Pilates studio	Chicago	55	35	40	100
Pilates studio	Austin	49	45	30	83
INDEPENDENT REALTORS					
Independent realtor	Atlanta	48	48	5	70
Independent realtor	Raleigh	42	25	10	100
Independent realtor	Austin	52	38	35	100

BUSINESS TYPE	CITY	SCORE	STRUCTURED DATA	BUSINESS IDENTITY	AI PRESENCE
Independent realtor	Austin	49	28	45	100
Independent realtor	Chicago	47	38	5	70
BED & BREAKFASTS					
Bed & breakfast	Atlanta	53	38	70	83
Bed & breakfast	Raleigh	41	0	25	100
Bed & breakfast	Austin	40	0	30	100
Bed & breakfast	Chicago	43	10	35	80
Bed & breakfast	Chicago	55	35	100	67

By industry: pilates studios averaged 51, chiropractic practices 49, independent realtors 48, bed and breakfasts 46. **The spread within each industry was as wide as the spread across industries.** A pilates studio scored 57; another in a different city scored 39. The difference was not the industry or the city. It was the degree to which each business had structured its information in ways AI can read.

• THE PROBLEM NOBODY TOLD YOU ABOUT

Your firm has 15 years of experience. AI doesn't mention you.

Let's start with what this looks like in practice.

A potential customer opens ChatGPT and types: *"Recommend a good accountant in Austin that specializes in small business taxes."* The AI responds instantly. It names three firms. It describes their specialties, their locations, their reputations. Your firm, the one with 15 years of experience, a 4.9-star Google rating, and a waiting list of clients, is not mentioned. Not ranked low or described poorly. **Simply absent.**

As far as AI is concerned, your business does not exist. This scenario is already happening millions of times a day. And it is happening to businesses that have done everything right by traditional standards.

The numbers behind the shift

The scale of this shift is not hypothetical. ChatGPT now has over **800 million weekly active users** (OpenAI, 2026). Gartner projects traditional search volume will **decline 25%** by the end of 2026. Google's AI Overviews now reach more than **2 billion monthly users**, and referral traffic from AI platforms is growing at roughly **800% year-over-year** (Semrush, 2025). AI-referred traffic converts at approximately **14%**, compared to ~3% for traditional organic search (Previsible, 2025–26). That is nearly five times the conversion rate.

These numbers tell a clear story. AI is not replacing search; it is becoming search. If your business is not represented in AI's answers, you are losing the highest-converting referral channel available.

The gap

For most small businesses, the disconnect between who they are and what AI says about them takes one of two forms.

Invisibility. AI has no information about your business and returns nothing, or returns generic responses that omit you entirely. You are functionally absent from every AI-powered conversation in your category.

Hallucination. AI presents fabricated information about your business with complete confidence. Wrong services, wrong location, invented specialties. The customer believes it. You never see the conversation.

• WHY BUSINESSES BECOME INVISIBLE TO AI

AI doesn't search the way you do.

You already know how Google works: type in keywords, browse a list of links, click through, decide. AI platforms work nothing like that. They assemble answers by pulling from training data, crawling indexed web content, and synthesizing information from multiple sources into a single response.

They do not “look you up” the way a human uses a search engine. Instead, they scan for structured signals across the entire web: metadata, schema markup, directory listings, review platforms, and third-party mentions. They piece together a portrait of your business from fragments scattered across dozens of sources.

If your business information exists only on your website in a format designed for human readers, AI may never detect it. If your information is scattered and contradictory, AI cannot determine what's accurate. If no one else on the internet talks about you, AI has no reason to trust what you say about yourself.

This is a different game than SEO. The overlap between Google search rankings and AI citations has dropped from approximately **70% to 20%** (Search Engine Land, 2025). Ranking well on Google does not mean AI knows you exist.

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Without structured data, your website is a book written in a language AI does not speak.

Why your business is invisible.

01 **No structured data.**

Your website speaks human, not machine. Most small business websites are built for people: compelling copy, clean navigation, beautiful photography. AI platforms read websites differently. They look for structured data: schema markup, metadata, clearly labeled information in formats machines can parse.

02 **Inconsistent information.**

Conflicting details across the web create noise AI cannot resolve. If your Google Business Profile lists one address, your Yelp page shows another, and your website mentions a third set of services, AI faces a conflict it cannot untangle. It picks one version, tries to average them, or simply skips you.

03 **No third-party validation.**

AI trusts what others say about you more than what you say about yourself. This works the way human trust works: a friend's recommendation carries more weight than a company's own advertisement. AI weighs third-party mentions, reviews, directory listings, press coverage, and professional citations heavily. If the only source of information about your business is your own website, AI has limited confidence in representing you.

04 **Thin or outdated content.**

AI favors substantive, recent, well-organized information. A five-page website last updated in 2022 sends a weak signal. A business that regularly publishes detailed service descriptions and maintains current information across platforms sends a much stronger one. Depth and freshness are not just good for marketing. They are how AI decides whether you are worth mentioning.

05 **No AI-specific optimization.**

The rules for being found by Google are not the same as the rules for being represented by AI. Traditional SEO focuses on keywords, backlinks, and page authority. AI visibility depends on entity clarity, content extractability, and multi-platform presence. Research shows that 40–60% of the sources cited in AI responses change month to month, but businesses with clear entity definitions and broad, consistent presence show up reliably (Search Engine Land, 2025).

• THE HALLUCINATION PROBLEM

Worse than invisibility is inaccuracy.

When AI cannot find reliable information about a business, it does not always stay silent. In many cases, it fills the gap with fabricated details presented as fact.

We tested a dental practice in a mid-size Texas city. The practice has operated for twelve years, focuses exclusively on general and cosmetic dentistry, and has hundreds of positive reviews. When we asked ChatGPT what services this practice offers, it listed **orthodontics and oral surgery**. The practice has never offered either. When we asked Gemini, it invented a specialty in **pediatric dentistry** the practice does not provide.

Both platforms delivered these fabrications with the same confident, helpful tone they use for accurate information.

The practice owner had no idea this was happening. There is no notification, no dashboard, no alert. The misinformation circulates in private conversations between AI and potential patients, and the business never sees it. **In our testing, hallucination is the norm.**

FROM THE FOUNDER

When we launched Signal & Structure AI and tested our own AI presence using our proprietary Signal Score methodology, we scored **0 out of 100**.

Over the next 60 days, as we applied the same framework we use with clients, our score climbed: **0, then 6, then 76, then 75, and most recently 80 out of 100**, reaching Strong Signal. AI platforms now mention us accurately. Hallucinations that previously placed us in unrelated industries have fallen significantly. We are not done.

We were a new business, so a zero on day one was not surprising. What is surprising is that businesses with ten, fifteen, twenty years of operation, hundreds of reviews, and strong local reputations score the same way. **Our zero was a starting point. Theirs is an invisible crisis they do not know they have.**

• THE SIGNAL STRENGTH FRAMEWORK

A thermometer for AI visibility.

To fix a problem, you first need a way to measure it. And right now, most business owners are trying to solve AI visibility without a thermometer. They can tell something feels off, but they cannot point to what, where, or how much. That is what the Signal Strength framework provides.

In this context, a **signal** is any piece of information that AI platforms can detect about your business. Your website content, your Google Business Profile, your directory listings, your reviews, your schema markup, mentions of your business on other websites. These are all signals. Some are strong and clear; others are weak, contradictory, or absent entirely.

Signal Strength is a measure of how accurately and completely AI can represent who you are, what you do, and why you matter. Developed by Signal & Structure AI, it provides a framework for diagnosing your AI visibility across a spectrum of four levels.

The four levels

NO SIGNAL	AI cannot find or describe the business. Responses are blank, generic, or entirely fabricated.	<i>“I don’t understand why nobody finds us online.”</i>
LOW SIGNAL	AI mentions the business but gets major details wrong. Wrong services, wrong location, fabricated information presented as fact.	<i>“People keep asking about services we don’t even offer.”</i>
WEAK SIGNAL	AI has basic information correct but significant gaps exist. Some platforms know you, others don’t. Differentiators are missing.	<i>“The basics are there but it doesn’t capture what makes us different.”</i>
STRONG SIGNAL	AI accurately represents the business across platforms. Identity, services, positioning, and differentiators are correct and consistent.	<i>“When someone asks AI about us, they get the truth.”</i>

Most small businesses fall in the No Signal or Low Signal categories, and most owners are unaware of where they stand. **Strong Signal is the difference between a customer hearing**

your name, or hearing your competitor's.

• SIX DIMENSIONS

What we measure when we measure your signal.

Signal Strength is the combined result of how a business performs across six distinct dimensions. Together they form the basis of the **Signal Score**, which tests AI representation across ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini.

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|-----------|---|---|
| 01 | Identity
<i>Does AI know who you are?</i> | If AI cannot correctly name your business, describe what you do, or distinguish you from competitors, every other dimension fails. Identity is the foundation. |
| 02 | Services
<i>Does AI know what you do?</i> | Misrepresented services mean mismatched referrals. When AI tells a customer you offer something you don't, or omits the service they need, the opportunity is lost before it starts. |
| 03 | Positioning
<i>Does AI know what makes you different?</i> | A correct but generic description makes you interchangeable with every competitor. AI needs to understand your differentiators, not just your category. |
| 04 | Location
<i>Does AI know where you are?</i> | For service-area and brick-and-mortar businesses, location accuracy directly determines whether AI refers local customers to you or to a competitor across town. |
| 05 | Reputation
<i>Does AI know what others say about you?</i> | Reviews, awards, professional recognitions, and third-party endorsements carry disproportionate weight in AI's decision-making. Without them, you lack the social proof AI uses to rank recommendations. |
| 06 | Discoverability
<i>Does AI recommend you when someone asks?</i> | The ultimate test. When a potential customer asks AI for a recommendation in your category and location, are you in the answer? This dimension measures whether all other signals combine into actual visibility. |
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A physical therapy clinic with over 200 five-star reviews scored strong on reputation but had zero discoverability. A landscaping company with detailed service pages scored well on services and identity, but AI consistently placed them in the wrong zip code because of conflicting location data across directories. The framework is designed to pinpoint exactly where your AI visibility breaks down, not just whether it exists.

• WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

The cost of invisibility.

AI invisibility is not an abstract technical problem. It creates three specific, measurable impacts on your business.

The compounding referral gap.

Every week that your business is absent from AI recommendations, potential customers are being routed to competitors. If AI handles even five recommendation conversations per week in your category and your local area, that is **260 missed opportunities per year**. Each one goes to a business that may have a weaker reputation but a stronger AI signal. Unlike a bad Google ranking, which you can see and track, these losses are completely invisible to you.

The silent customer loss from bad information.

When AI fabricates details about your business, the damage happens quietly. A potential customer reads that you offer a service you do not provide, visits your website, sees no mention of it, and moves on. They do not call to ask. They do not leave a review. They simply disappear.

Competitive displacement that accelerates over time.

AI platforms learn and reinforce over time. A competitor that appears in AI answers today will appear more frequently tomorrow, as user interactions validate and strengthen their presence. **The gap between visible and invisible businesses widens over time.** Waiting is not neutral; it means falling behind.

The first-mover advantage

Here is the good news: this is early. Most businesses have never asked “What does AI say about me?” The concept of AI visibility is new enough that the playing field has not yet been defined. Businesses that address this now, that understand their Signal Strength, correct misinformation, and build structured, AI-readable signals, will have a compounding advantage as AI becomes the primary discovery channel.

Research from Princeton University, Georgia Tech, and IIT Delhi found that adding citations, statistics, and expert context to content can **improve AI search visibility by 30–40%** (Princeton/Georgia Tech/IIT Delhi, 2024). The window for first-mover advantage will not stay open indefinitely. The time to act is before your competitors realize they need to.

- ABOUT SIGNAL & STRUCTURE AI

Closing that gap is what we do.

Signal & Structure AI helps small businesses become visible, accurate, and competitive in the age of AI-powered discovery. We created the **Signal Score methodology**, a proprietary diagnostic system that tests how AI platforms represent businesses across three major AI platforms and six dimensions of visibility. We measure how AI sees your business, identify what's wrong or missing, and help you fix it.

Founded by Lenise Kenney, Signal & Structure AI grew from a direct observation: even well-run businesses with strong reputations are invisible to AI. Our mission is to close that gap, to make sure the businesses that deserve to be found actually are.

- FINDING OUT WHERE YOU STAND

Two ways to start.

Signal Pulse is a free quick check available at signalstructure.ai. It evaluates two of the six dimensions of AI visibility: enough to tell you whether you are broadcasting or invisible, but not enough to show you the full picture. It takes minutes and costs nothing.

For the complete picture, the **founding beta** is where Signal & Structure AI evaluates your business across all three major AI platforms and all six dimensions of visibility. You receive your score, the story AI is telling about you, what's accurate, what's wrong, what's missing, and a clear path to improve it. Founding member intake is open through June 2026.

You're not broken. You're just not broadcasting. That's fixable.

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Signal Score is a proprietary methodology of Signal & Structure AI. For more information, visit signalstructure.ai. This is a preliminary edition; methodology, dataset, and findings will be updated as additional businesses are added to the study.