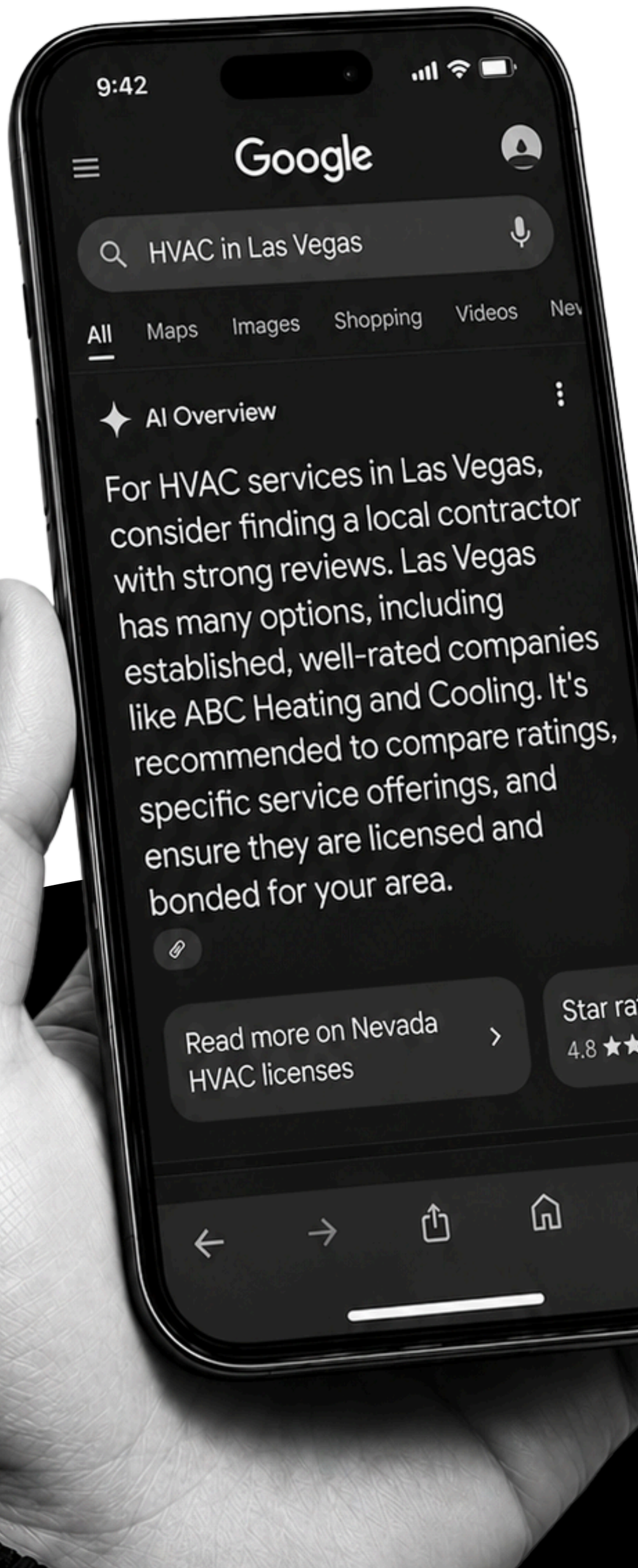
THE ULTIMATE

AI SEO PLAYBOOK

TRADEOPS CONSULTING

MORE VISIBILITY.
MORE CALLS.
LESS
GUESSWORK.



CO-FOUNDER · TRADEOPS CONSULTING

Bengt Jobe.

I started in the trades. I built a home-service business, then sold it. Now I help other owners do the same, only faster.

50+
BUSINESSES SERVED

$20M+
TRACKED REVENUE ADDED

US + CA
CLIENTS ACROSS BOTH



BENGT JOBE, CO-FOUNDER

THE JOURNEY

EARLY DAYS
In the trades
I worked in the trades. Boots, trucks, dirt under the nails.

BUILT IT
My own shop
I started, scaled, and sold a home-service business of my own.

2021
Helping other owners
I took everything I learned getting customers for myself and started offering marketing to other home-service businesses.

2025
Co-founded TradeOps
I co-founded TradeOps to bring industry experience together with world-class service delivery.

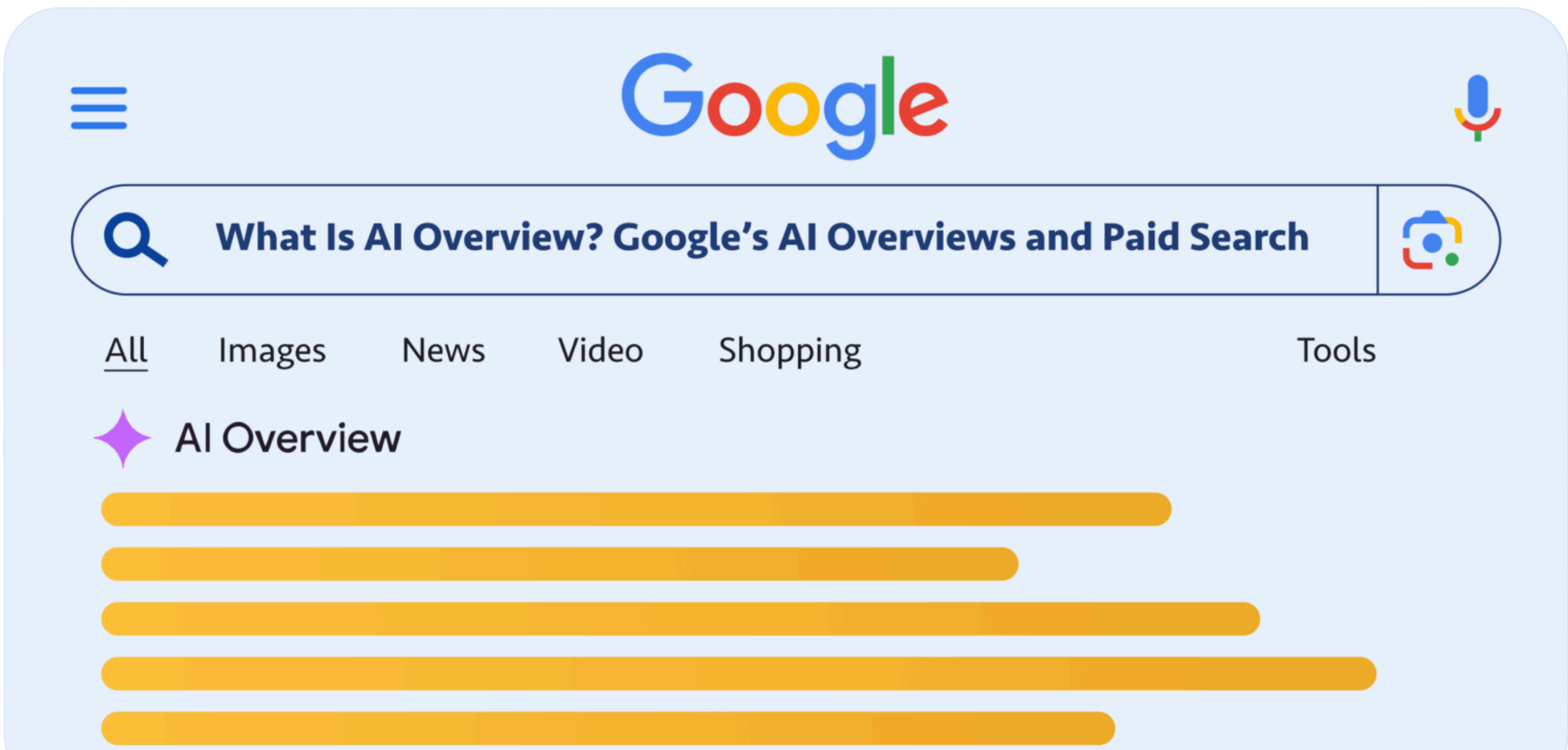
2026 →
Now
Top of class marketing and growth consulting for 50+ trades businesses across the US and Canada.

A Quick *Introduction*

Homeowners no longer just Google "AC repair near me."
They now:

- Ask ChatGPT for the best HVAC company in their city
- Get an AI Overview before seeing any business listing
- Ask Perplexity to compare local plumbers
- Use Google's AI Mode

In every scenario, an AI decides who gets recommended.
If you're not in the answer, you're not in the conversation.



A Quick *Introduction*

Why AI search matters for home service in 2026

- 900M+ people now use ChatGPT for service searches, including "best HVAC in [city]" and "who should I call for a frozen pipe."
- AI Overviews appear above your business listing, map pack, and every paid ad on most local service searches.
- Ranking in AI is not the same as ranking on Google, different signals, different sources. The companies winning AI search are not always the ones ranked #1.
- Most home service businesses in your market have done nothing to optimize for AI. The bar is currently low. It will not stay that way.

A Quick *Introduction*

What you will get from this guide

How AI search actually works for home service. The 3 ChatGPT prompts that audit what AI currently knows about your business. The foundation that makes you citable (classic SEO done right, plus a few AI-specific moves).

The distribution playbook that gets your business mentioned across the sources LLMs trust. A 90-day roadmap and the 10 mistakes that kill AI visibility for trades.

A note on the space: AI search is moving fast. The tactics in this guide work in 2026. Some will evolve as Google and OpenAI patch them. We will tell you which tactics are foundational (those are not going anywhere) and which are leverage plays (which work now but may shift). Build the foundation first.

Implement two or three things from this guide and you will see AI mentions appear within 30 to 60 days. Implement everything and you will be the default home service recommendation in your market within 6 months.

Want us to audit your AI visibility for you? Book a brief strategy call and we will run our proprietary prompts to show you exactly what LLMs currently say about your business, and how to fix it.
https://calendly.com/yashsinghblogger

How AI Search
Actually Works

Before you optimize for AI search, you need to understand what is happening when a homeowner asks ChatGPT or Google's AI Overview a question. The mechanism is different from old-school Google search, and that difference is the whole game.

The Old Way vs. The New Way

Before, a homeowner Googled "best HVAC in Phoenix," got 10 links, clicked around, and decided who to call. Your job was to be one of those 10 links.

Now, she types the same question into ChatGPT. The AI reads dozens of sources in the background and delivers one short answer naming 3–5 companies. She never visits a single website. Your job is to be one of those 3–5 companies.

How AI Search *Actually Works*

The Two Mechanics That Decide Who Gets Named

1. Query Fanout ChatGPT doesn't run one search, it expands your question into 5–20 related searches behind the scenes: "top rated HVAC Phoenix," "licensed HVAC Phoenix," "Phoenix AC repair reviews," etc., then synthesizes results from all of them.

What this means: You don't need to rank for one exact keyword. You need to appear across the cluster of related queries. **Topic coverage beats keyword targeting.**

2. RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation) When AI doesn't have a confident answer from training data, it retrieves live sources from the web. ChatGPT pulls from Bing. Google AI Overviews pull from Google. Perplexity pulls from multiple engines.

The most important insight in this guide: If you don't rank in traditional search, AI won't cite you. AI search is built on top of classic search, not separate from it.



How AI Search *Actually Works*

What makes a source AI-citable

AI prioritizes sources that have:

- Strong authority - established sites with real backlinks get cited more than new domains
- Query intent match - a "best of" listicle beats a company homepage for recommendation queries
- Cross-platform presence - businesses mentioned on Google, Bing, Reddit, and YouTube get cited far more than those only on one platform
- Clear structure - AI parses content faster when it has headings, lists, FAQs, and direct factual statements like "Acme HVAC is licensed, insured, and serves all of Maricopa County"

You're not optimizing for one algorithm. You're optimizing for a system that scrapes the open web, weighs authority, prefers structure, and rewards businesses mentioned everywhere.

The 4 Places Homeowners

Search Now

The New Reality

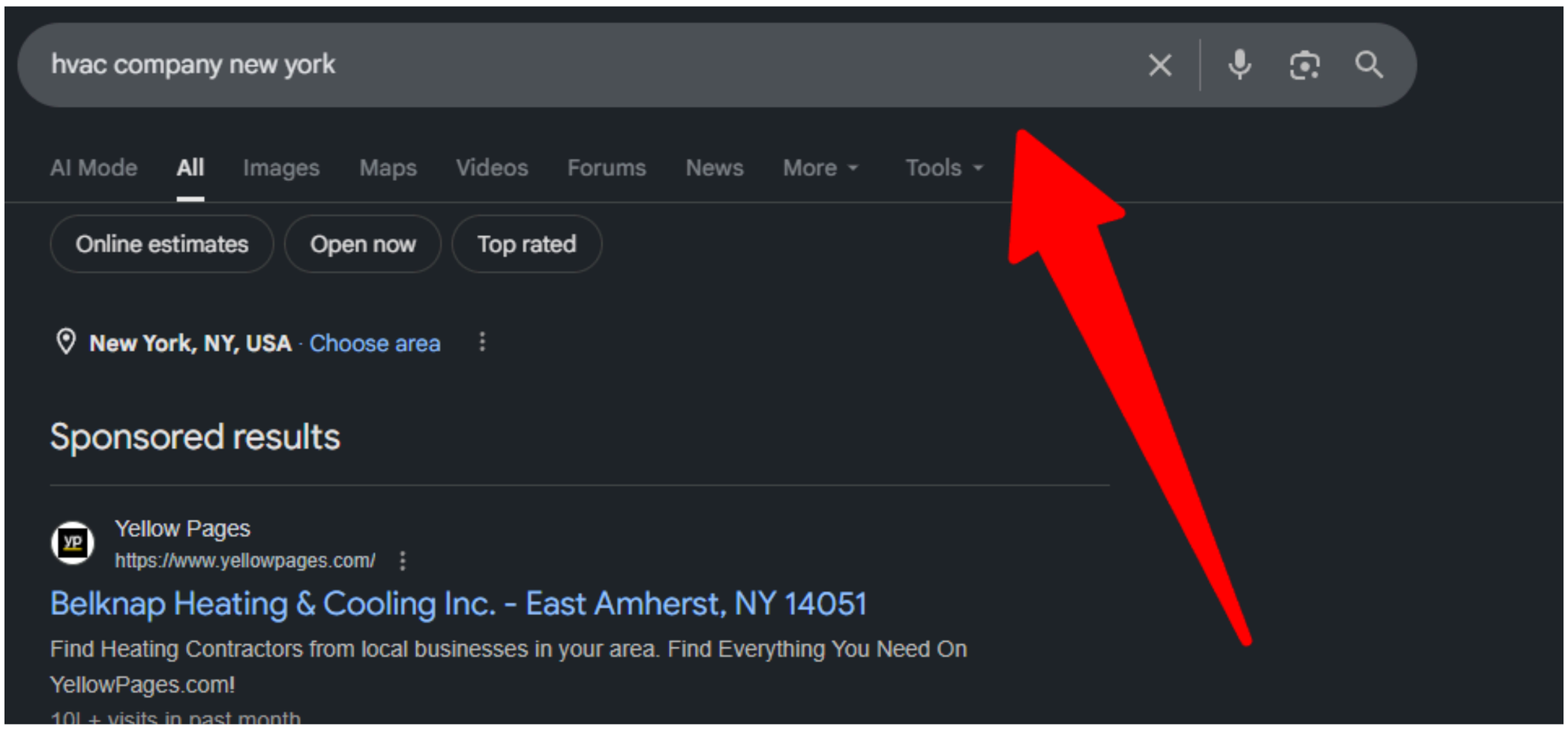
A homeowner shopping for HVAC or plumbing in 2026 splits her search across four different surfaces, each with different ranking rules. You need to be present on all four.

1. Traditional Google Search

Still the largest search engine on the planet and the source most AI products pull from. Ranking on Google is the foundation everything else depends on.

What ranks: Strong local SEO, optimized Google Business Profile, real reviews, backlinks, and content that answers homeowner questions.

For home service: The Local Pack (map with 3 businesses) is still the single highest-converting search result. Optimize your GBP relentlessly.



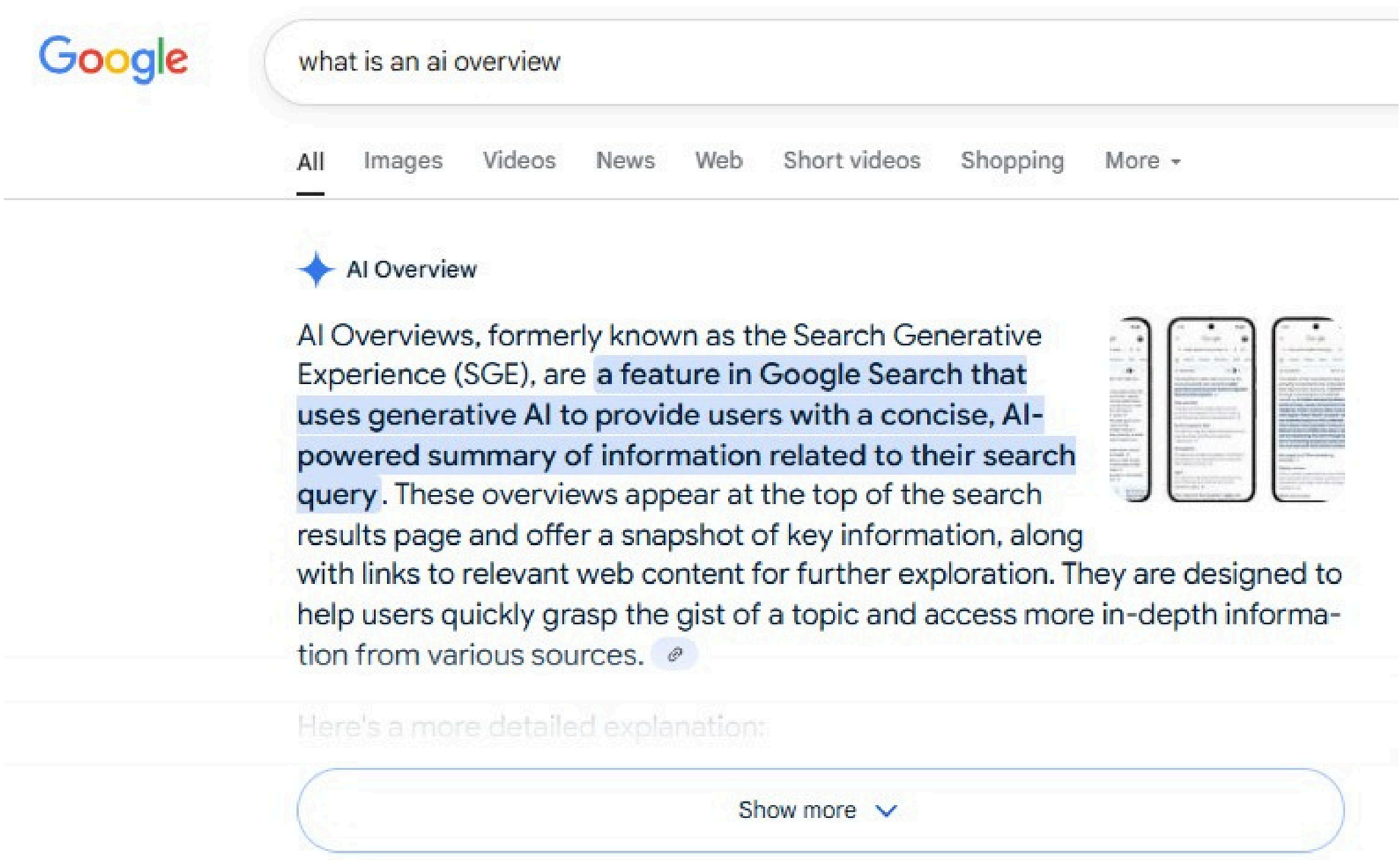
The 4 Places Homeowners *Search Now*

2. Google AI Overviews

The AI-generated summary that now appears above search results for most home service queries. It picks 3–5 businesses and names them in a paragraph. Most homeowners read the summary and stop scrolling.

What ranks: Businesses that already rank well in traditional Google search PLUS businesses mentioned across multiple third-party sources Google trusts, directories, review sites, local press, Reddit.

The trick most operators miss: Just ranking #1 on Google doesn't guarantee you appear in the AI Overview. Being mentioned across many trusted sources does.



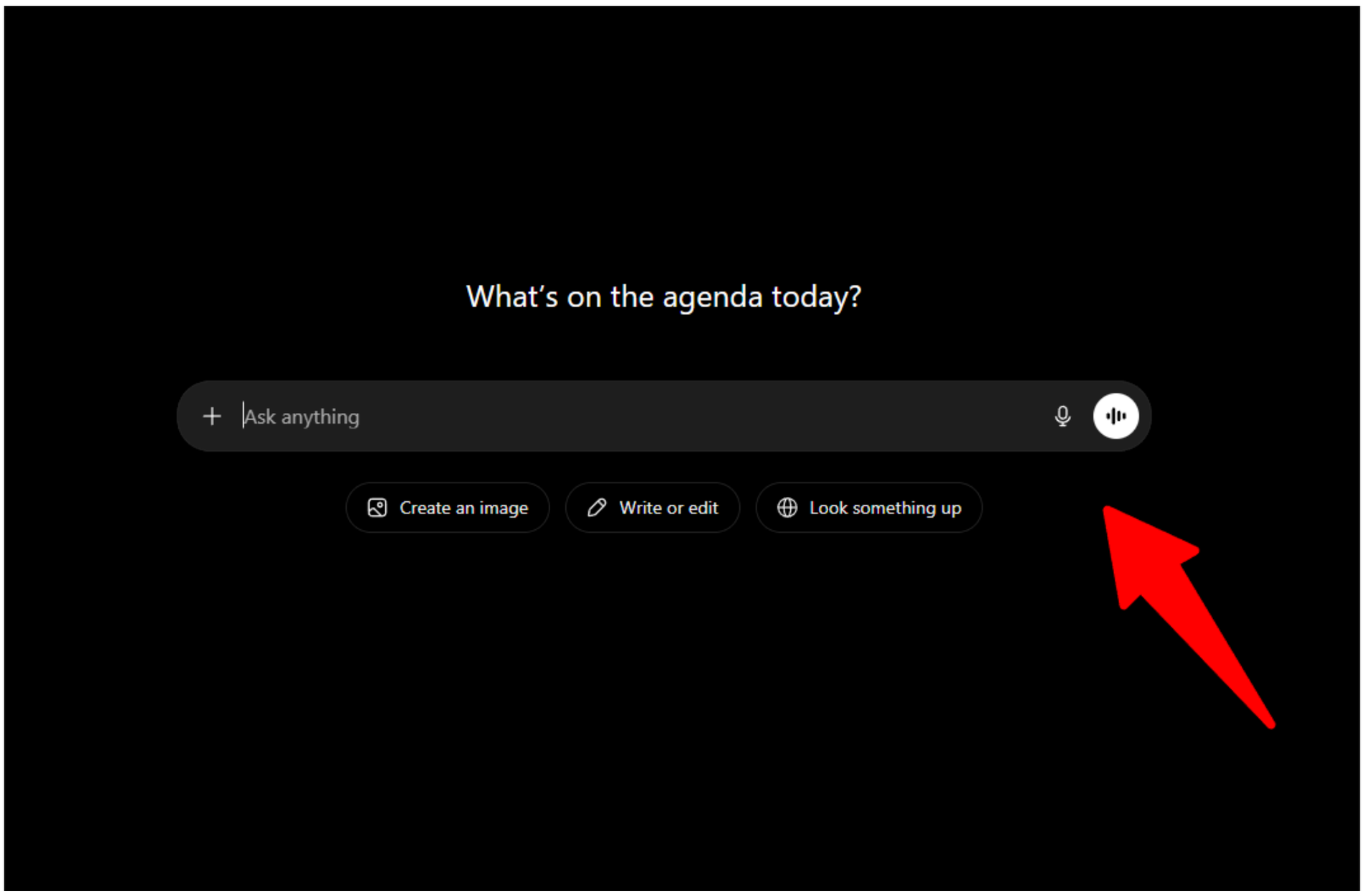
The 4 Places Homeowners *Search Now*

3. ChatGPT

Over 900 million users now ask ChatGPT product and service questions instead of Google. When ChatGPT doesn't have a confident answer from training data, it searches the web via Bing and synthesizes the results.

What ranks: Businesses cited by sources Bing ranks well, listicles, Reddit threads, established review sites, and brand mentions across the open web.

For home service: ChatGPT heavily favors "best of" listicles. If your business is named in 3–5 of those for your city, you'll be cited almost every time someone asks ChatGPT for a recommendation in your market.



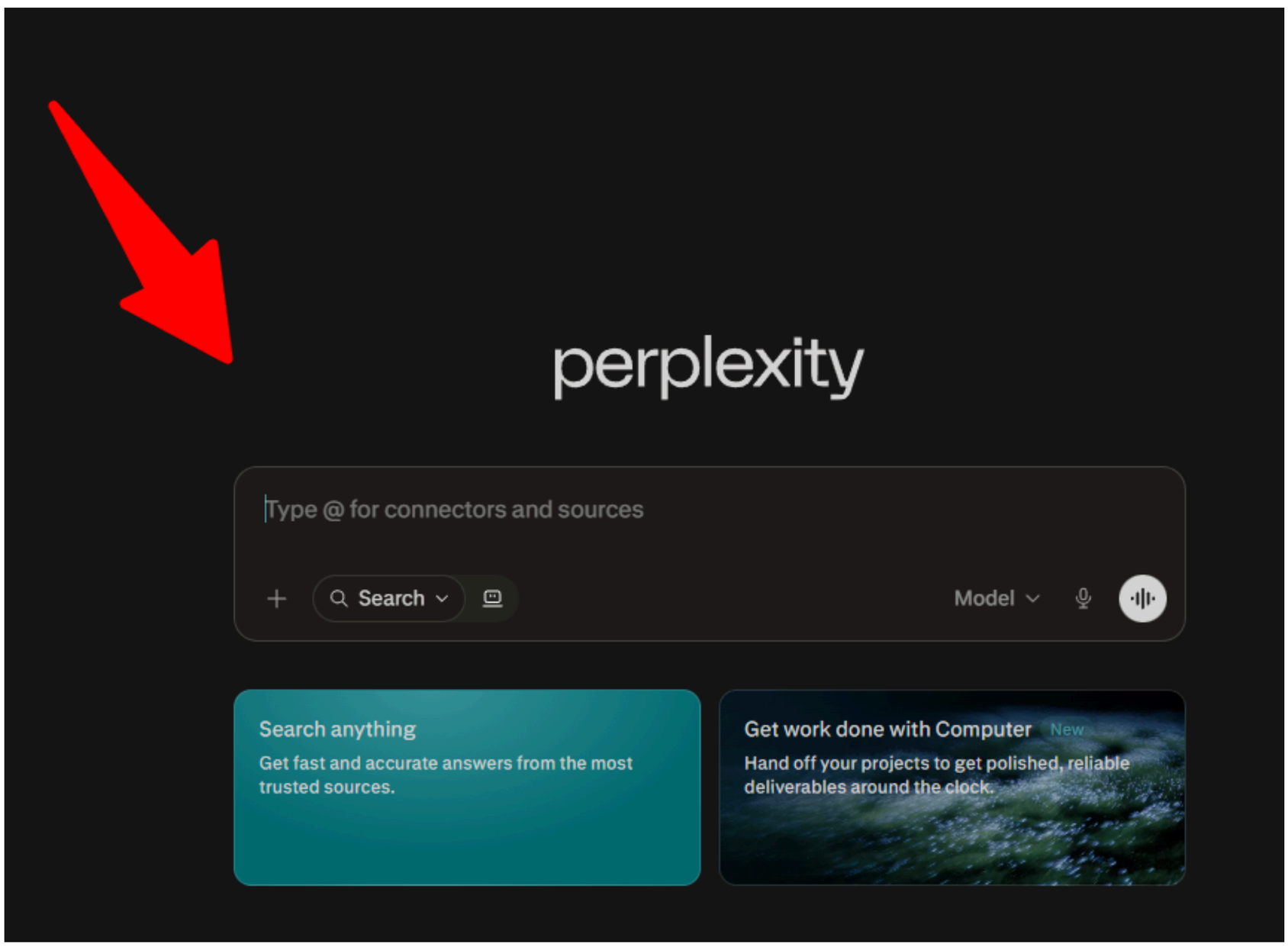
The 4 Places Homeowners *Search Now*

4. Perplexity

A search-first AI product that shows its sources for every answer. Smaller user base than ChatGPT but disproportionately used by high-intent buyers actively researching before making a purchase decision.

What ranks: Sources Perplexity classifies as authoritative, Reddit, YouTube, LinkedIn, and major publications. Less weight on a company's own homepage, more on third-party mentions.

For home service: A single thread on r/Phoenix recommending your HVAC company can drive Perplexity citations for months. Your YouTube videos also earn serious citation weight here.



The 4 Places Homeowners

Search Now

The Key Takeaway

You don't need 4 different strategies. You need one strategy built around trusted sources, because all four surfaces pull from the same trusted sources, just weighted differently. Build a presence in those sources and all four surfaces start citing you.

Some tactics like Google Business Profile and classic SEO move all four at once. Others like YouTube and Reddit move two or three. Build the foundation first, then layer on the rest.

The Foundation Truth:

Classic SEO Is Still the Engine

The Truth Nobody Selling AI SEO Wants You to Know

AI search performance correlates directly with classic SEO performance. If your business ranks well on Google and Bing, AI will cite you. If it doesn't, no amount of "GEO optimization" will save you. There is no AI shortcut around bad SEO, no clever tactic that gets you cited by ChatGPT while you sit on page 4 of Google.

Every AI search product retrieves live web sources to answer questions. When it does, it asks the same question every search engine asks: which sources are most authoritative and relevant?

The answer is decided by classic ranking signals, backlinks, domain authority, content quality, local SEO signals. The same things that have decided Google rankings for two decades. AI didn't invent new ranking signals. It just reads the existing ones and summarizes the top results into a paragraph.

The Foundation Truth:

Classic SEO Is Still the Engine

The Three Foundation Moves That Matter Most

1. Google Business Profile dialed in. For local home service, GBP is the single highest-leverage asset you own. Optimize your name, address, phone, hours, categories, services, photos, and posts. Collect real reviews systematically. Populate Q&A. A fully optimized GBP moves AI Overviews more than almost any other single tactic.

2. A real website with real content. Not a one-page brochure. You need dedicated service pages for each trade and each city you serve, educational content that answers homeowner questions, and schema markup so search engines and AI can parse your site cleanly.

3. Backlinks from trusted sources. Local press mentions, industry directories, trade association listings, community involvement that earns links. AI weighs backlink authority heavily when deciding which sources to cite.

If those three aren't in place, every other tactic in this guide will underperform. If they are in place, everything else compounds on top of them.

The Foundation Truth:

Classic SEO Is Still the Engine

The Honest Take

The businesses dominating AI search in HVAC and plumbing markets are the same businesses that already dominated classic search. They built the foundation over years. AI search just made that foundation more valuable, instead of being one of 10 blue links, they're now one of 3–5 companies named in an AI-generated answer.

If you've been doing SEO right, AI search is your reward. If you haven't, this guide gives you the priority order to fix it.

Audit What AI Currently Knows About You

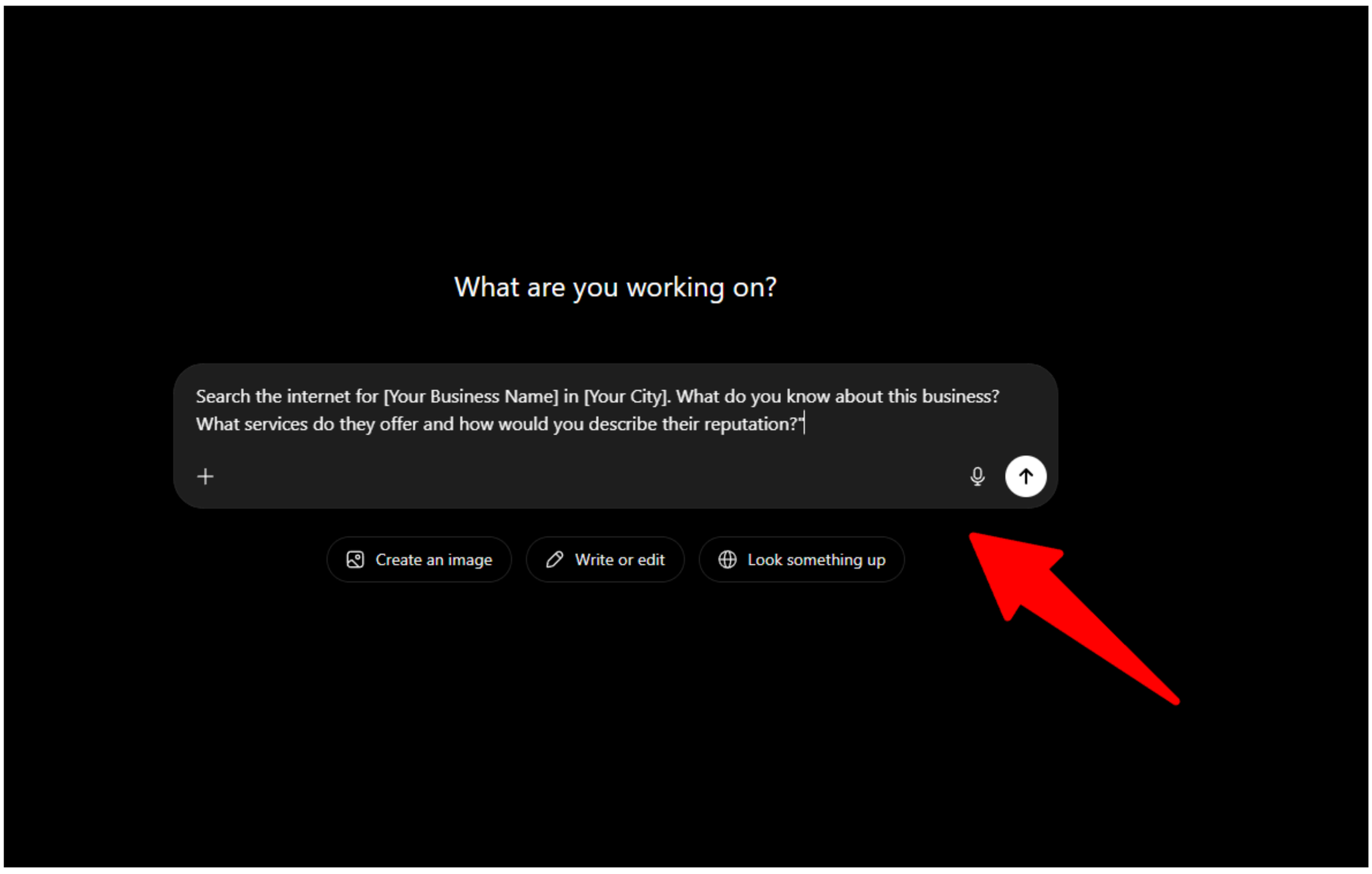
Before optimizing anything, run these 3 ChatGPT prompts. No tools, no logins, just open ChatGPT.

The Foundation Truth:

Classic SEO Is Still the Engine

Prompt 1: What does AI know about your business? "Search the internet for [Your Business Name] in [Your City]. What do you know about this business? What services do they offer and how would you describe their reputation?"

Look for: Does ChatGPT find you at all? Does it describe your services correctly? What sources is it pulling from? That source list is the foundation of everything you optimize next.



The Foundation Truth:

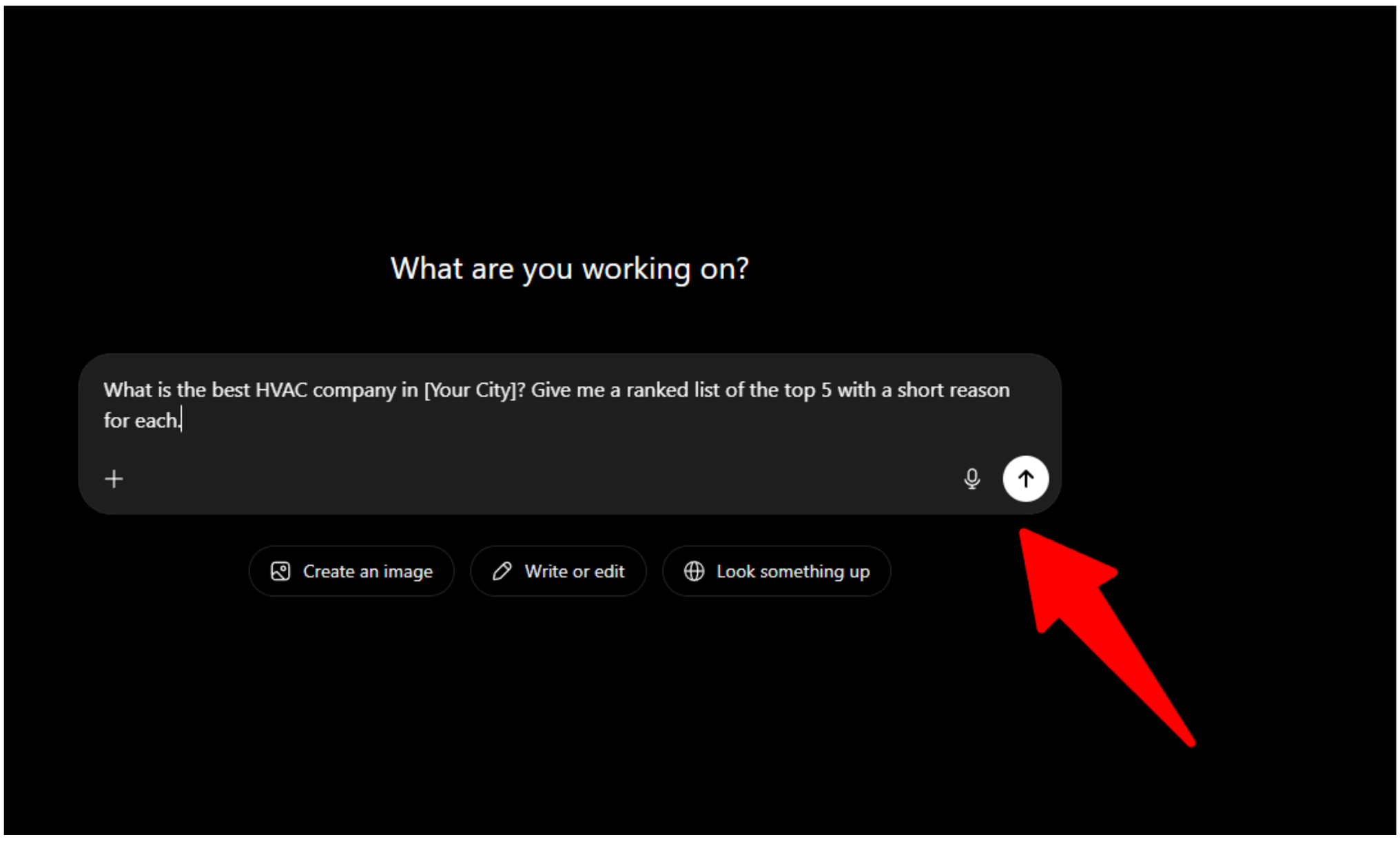
Classic SEO Is Still the Engine

Prompt 2: Where do you stand against competitors?

"What is the best HVAC company in [Your City]? Give me a ranked list of the top 5 with a short reason for each."

Look for: Does your business appear and at what position? Who's ranked ahead of you, these are your real AI competitors. What reasons does ChatGPT give for each?

Whatever it says about competitors is what you need to make true and visible about your own business. Repeat this for each major service line, best AC repair, best furnace installation, best emergency HVAC. Each answer is a separate visibility problem.



The Foundation Truth:

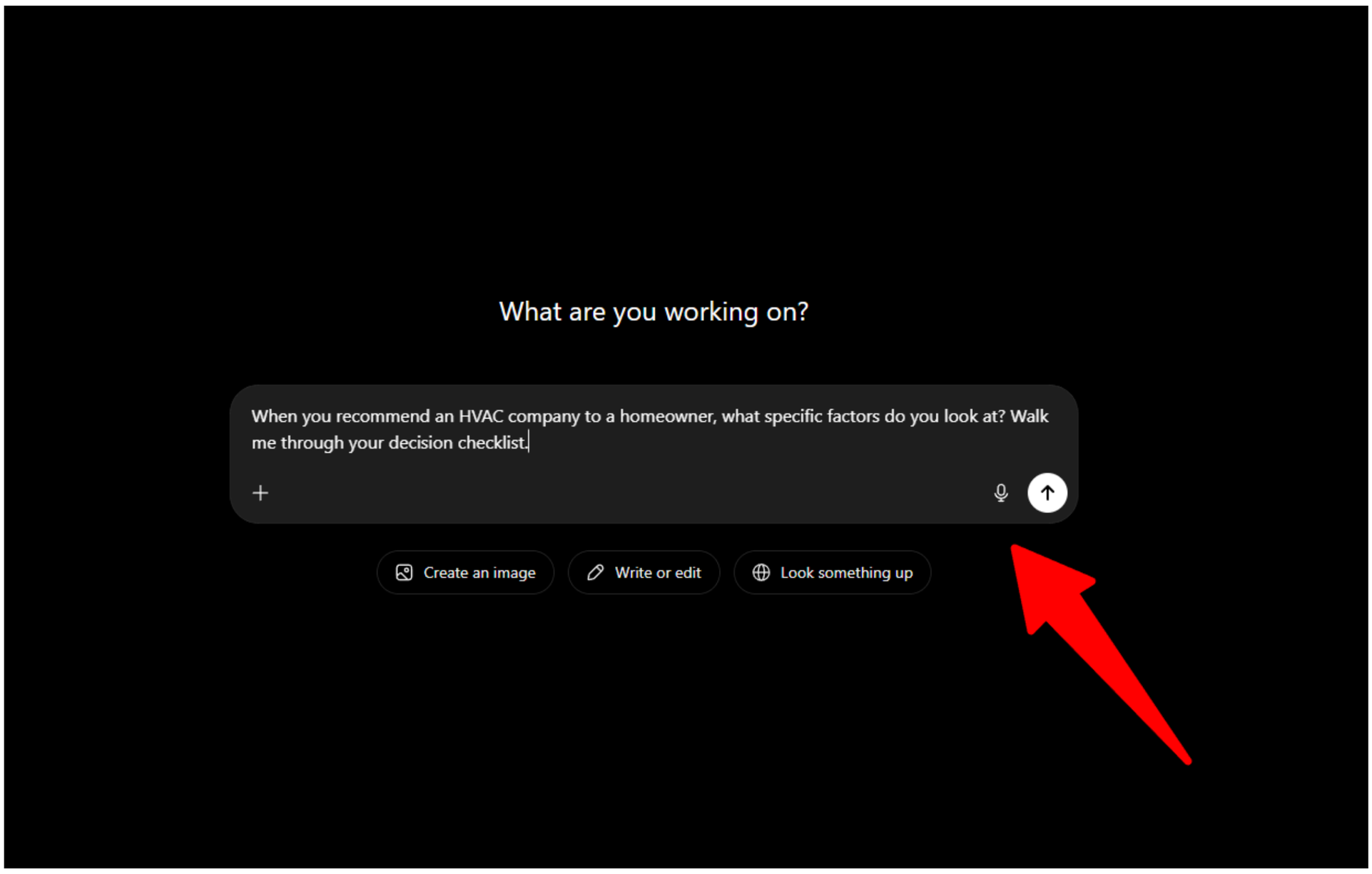
Classic SEO Is Still the Engine

Prompt 3: What does AI look for when recommending in your category?

"When you recommend an HVAC company to a homeowner, what specific factors do you look at? Walk me through your decision checklist."

ChatGPT will give you the criteria it actually uses, licensing, insurance, review count and recency, years in business, certifications like NATE and EPA, response time, pricing transparency, specialty services.

Compare that checklist against what your online presence actually shows. Every gap is a fix. Save your screenshots and re-run these prompts in 60 days to measure progress.



Reverse Engineering the *AI Ranking Checklist*

Turn the Checklist Into a 30-Day Action Plan

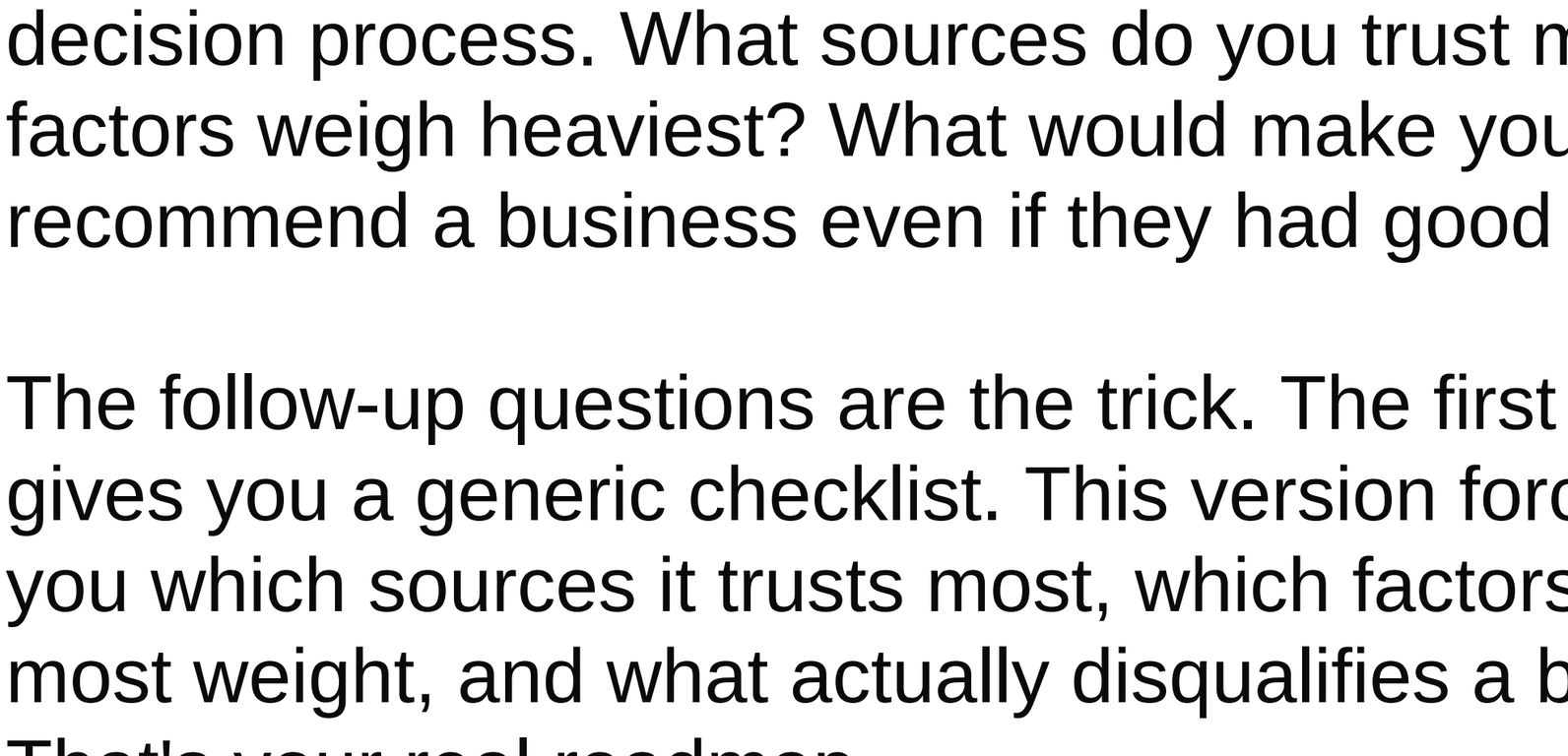
The third prompt from the audit gave you a checklist of criteria AI uses to recommend HVAC and plumbing companies. Most operators read it, nod, and close the chat. Don't. That checklist is the most actionable AI SEO document you'll ever own.

Step 1: Get a real checklist, not a generic one

Open a fresh ChatGPT chat and type:

"When you recommend an HVAC contractor to a homeowner in [Your City], walk me through your exact decision process. What sources do you trust most? What factors weigh heaviest? What would make you NOT recommend a business even if they had good reviews?"

The follow-up questions are the trick. The first prompt gives you a generic checklist. This version forces AI to tell you which sources it trusts most, which factors carry the most weight, and what actually disqualifies a business. That's your real roadmap.



Reverse Engineering the *AI Ranking Checklist*

Step 2: Map every item on the checklist to your online presence

Open a spreadsheet. Three columns:

Criterion AI looks for	Where it should appear online	Current status
Licensed and insured	**Website footer, GBP attributes, Yelp, Angie**	**❌ Missing on website**
NATE certification	**Website, GBP, manufacturer directories**	**✅ On GBP, ❌ Not on website**
Years in business	**Website homepage, About page, GBP**	**✅ Everywhere**
24/7 emergency service	**Website, GBP hours, lead form**	**✅ Website, ❌ GBP says closes 6pm**

Walk through every criterion the AI gave you. For each one ask: does my online presence actually prove this, and where does it prove it? Most home service businesses find 5–15 gaps. Fixing them is mechanical work, not creative work, and it moves your AI visibility within weeks.

Reverse Engineering the *AI Ranking Checklist*

Step 3: Compare your checklist to your competitors' visibility

Take the 2–3 competitors AI ranked ahead of you. Search each one in ChatGPT and ask:

"Search the internet for [Competitor Name]. What does this business specialize in and what makes them recommended in [Your City]?"

You'll find one of two patterns:

Pattern A - Your competitor has the same services and credentials as you but their online presence makes them more visible. The fix is mechanical: make sure your website, GBP, and third-party listings actually prove what your business offers. This is the most common gap.

Reverse Engineering the *AI Ranking Checklist*

Pattern B - Your competitor has something genuine you don't, a certification, a specialty service, a notable award. The fix is to either earn that thing or differentiate around something you have that they don't.

The rest of this guide tells you how to fix each category of gap, website foundation, listicles, GBP, third-party directories, YouTube, Reddit, and backlinks. Each one closes a specific type of gap on your checklist.



The Website Foundation for *AI Visibility*

Your Website Is the Only Source You Fully Control

Every other source AI cites, directories, reviews, listicles, Reddit, is something someone else decides what to publish about you. Get your website right and you control the most important data source AI uses to understand your business.

Most home service websites were built for humans clicking Google ads in 2018. They are not built for AI. The fixes below are mostly free and they compound.

1. Write Like an AI Is Reading - Because One Is

AI reads literally. Humans scan and infer. If your homepage says "we serve the greater metro area," AI doesn't know what city you serve. If it says "we've been doing this a long time," AI doesn't know how long. Vague language is invisible to AI.

The Website Foundation for *AI Visibility*

Vague (AI-invisible)	Specific (AI-citable)
"We serve the greater metro area"	"Acme HVAC serves Phoenix, Glendale, Tempe, and Scottsdale, Arizona."
"We have been doing this a long time"	"Acme HVAC has served Phoenix homeowners since 2008."
"Licensed and insured"	"Acme HVAC is licensed (ROC #12345) & carries $2 million in liability insurance."
"Fast emergency response"	"Acme HVAC guarantees a 60-minute response for emergency calls within Maricopa County."

Every page on your site should be packed with specific, factual statements like these. AI quotes facts. It does not quote marketing fluff.

The Website Foundation for *AI Visibility*

2. One page per service, one page per city

If you serve 6 cities and offer 4 services, you need 24 location-service pages, not one "service area" page that lists all 24.

Each page should answer: what is this service, what does it cost, what does the process look like, who do we serve, where do we serve them, and why us? Each page becomes its own AI-citable source for queries like "AC repair in Tempe" or "water heater installation in Glendale."

HVAC Services in East Alton, IL	HVAC Services in O'Fallon, IL
HVAC Services in Wood River, IL	HVAC Services in Mt. Vernon, IL
HVAC Services in Holiday Shores	HVAC Services in South Roxana, IL
HVAC Services in Glen Carbon, IL	HVAC Services in Springfield, IL
HVAC Services in Effingham, IL	HVAC Services in Alton, IL
HVAC Services in Godfrey, IL	HVAC Services in Belleville, IL
HVAC Services in Granite City, IL	HVAC Services in Maryville, IL
HVAC Services in Hartford, IL	HVAC Services in Cottage Hills, IL
HVAC Services in Litchfield, IL	

The Website Foundation for *AI Visibility*

3. FAQs at the bottom of every page

AI search is question-driven. Homeowners ask things like "how much does AC repair cost in Phoenix" and "how long does a furnace installation take."

If your page has those exact questions as FAQ headings with clear answers below them, AI quotes you directly.

Add 4–6 FAQs to the bottom of every service page. Use real homeowner questions and answer each one in 2–3 sentences with specific facts.

Example FAQ on an "AC Repair in Phoenix" page:"How much does AC repair cost in Phoenix? Most AC repairs in Phoenix run between $150 and $600. Common issues like capacitor replacement run $150–$300. Refrigerant leaks and compressor issues can reach $1,000 or more. Acme HVAC provides a flat-rate quote before any work begins."

That FAQ contains the question verbatim, specific price ranges, common issue types, and a brand mention. ChatGPT and Google AI Overviews will pull from it regularly.

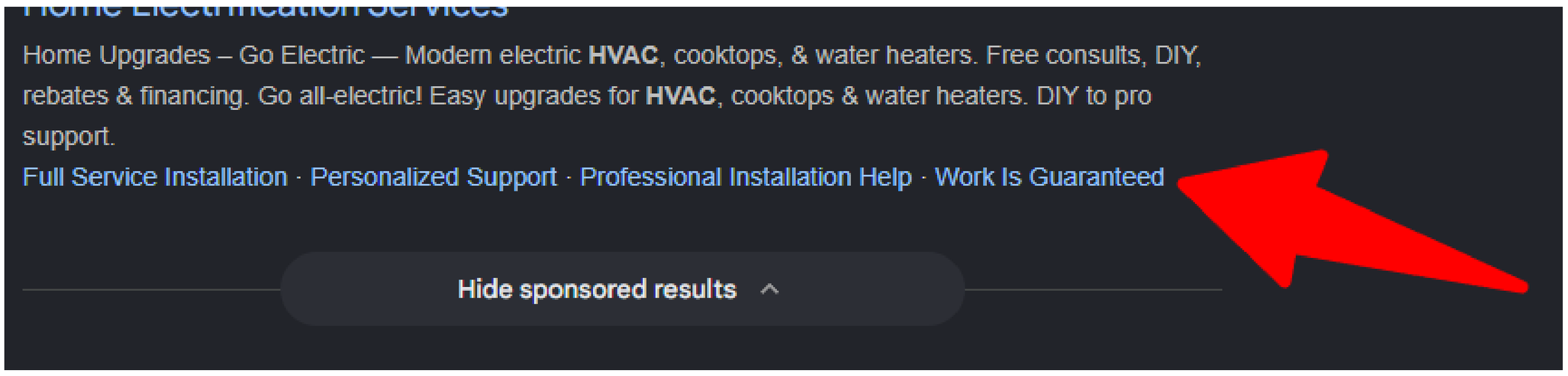
The Website Foundation for *AI Visibility*

4. Schema Markup That AI Actually Uses

Schema markup is code that tells search engines what your content means in a structured format. Most home service sites have none. The three that matter most:

- LocalBusiness schema - tells search engines your name, address, phone, hours, service area, and category. Add it sitewide.
- FAQPage schema - marks up your FAQ sections so AI recognizes them as questions and answers. Without this, AI may miss your FAQs entirely.
- Service schema - marks up each service you offer with description, area served, and pricing range.

You don't need to write this yourself. Tell your web person to add LocalBusiness, FAQPage, and Service schema to your site. It takes a few hours and costs less than $500. The lift in AI citability is one of the highest-ROI moves on this page.



Topic Domination for
Local Trades

Go Deep on One Topic at a Time

Most home service businesses spread their content thin across 20 topics and end up authoritative on none of them. The winning strategy is the opposite, go a mile deep on one topic until AI considers you the default source for it, then move to the next. This is the single highest-leverage content tactic in this guide.

Start with one service in one city. Not "HVAC in Arizona", something specific like "furnace repair in St. Louis" or "tankless water heater installation in Dallas."

The narrower the topic, the faster you dominate it. A national brand has broad content but nothing deep about furnace repair in your specific city. That gap is yours to fill.

Pick the topic where you already do the work profitably, local competition is weak, and the job size justifies the content investment, replacement work, not $89 service calls.

Topic Domination for
Local Trades

What Real Topic Domination Looks Like

Most operators write one page called "Furnace Repair St. Louis" and stop. That's participation, not domination. Real domination for "furnace repair in St. Louis" looks like this:

- Hub page - Furnace Repair in St. Louis (main commercial page)
- Cost content - How much does furnace repair cost in St. Louis?
- Comparison content - Furnace repair vs. furnace replacement in St. Louis
- Problem-specific - Common furnace problems in St. Louis homes
- Brand-specific - Carrier furnace repair in St. Louis, Lennox furnace repair in St. Louis
- Urgency-specific - Emergency furnace repair in St. Louis
- Adjacent services - Furnace tune-up in St. Louis, Furnace humidifier installation in St. Louis

When AI fans out your query into 5–20 related searches, you appear in all of them. That's how you get cited consistently instead of occasionally.

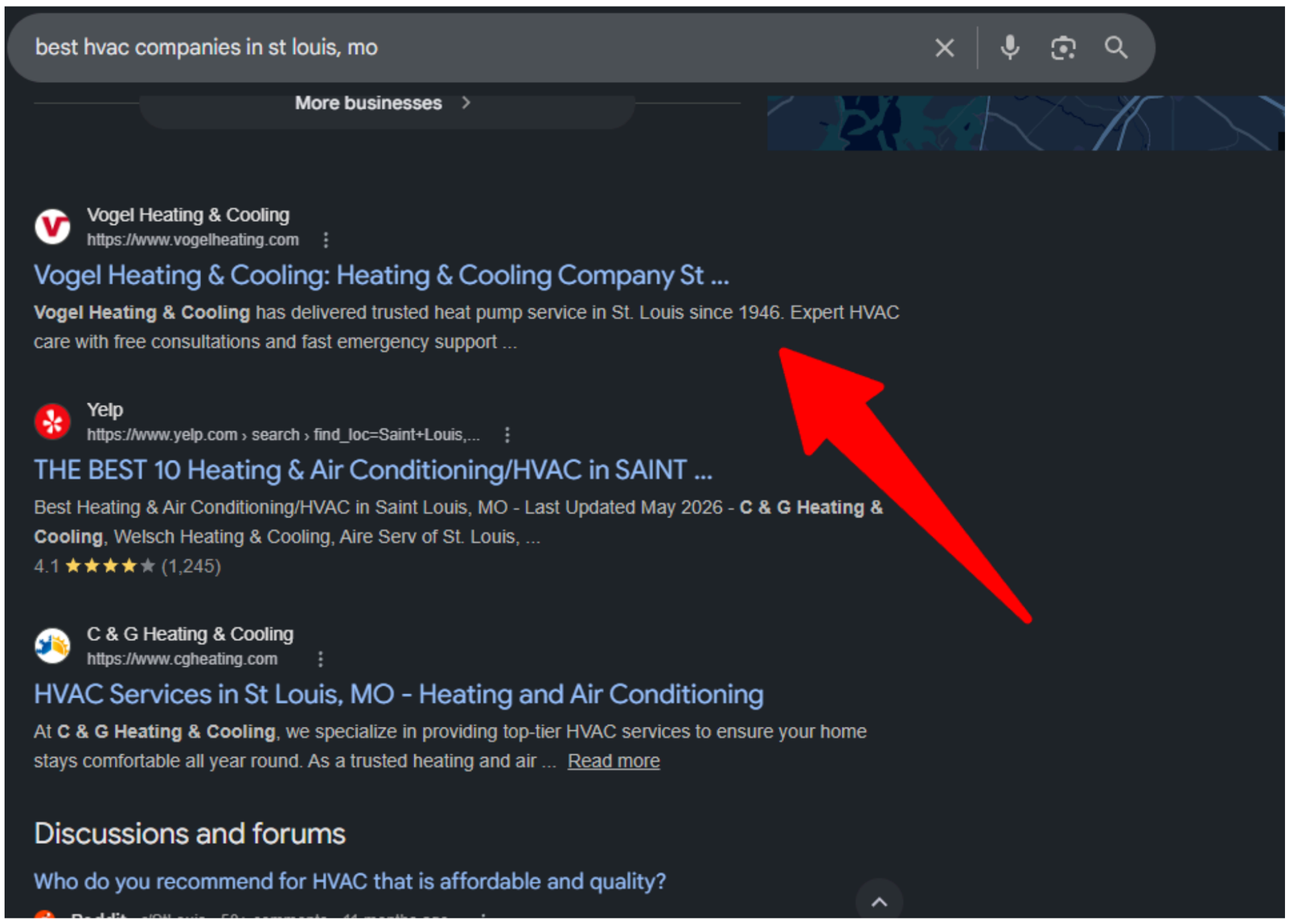
Topic Domination for
Local Trades

Listicles: The #1 Weapon for AI Visibility

When ChatGPT or Google AI Overviews answer "who is the best HVAC company in [city]?" they almost always pull from one type of source: listicles. "Best of" articles, ranked roundups, "top 10" lists. AI loves listicles because they pre-rank options in exactly the format AI needs to answer comparison queries.

Most operators assume listicles only count when published on someone else's site. That's wrong. AI doesn't care who published the listicle, it cares whether the content matches the query intent.

Build a page on your own website titled "Top 10 HVAC Companies in [Your City] in 2026." Rank yourself first. Then list 8–10 legitimate competitors with honest descriptions. Counterintuitive, but here's why it works:



Topic Domination for
Local Trades

- AI Overviews and ChatGPT pull from this format constantly
- Your business gets named first on a page that ranks for "best HVAC in [city]" queries
- Listing real competitors makes the article credible to both readers and AI
- The page becomes a citation source that includes your business at the top

Real example: An SEO consultant built a "Top SEO Speakers in London" page on his own site, listed himself first, then listed 9 industry-known names. Within weeks his business was cited in AI Overviews and ChatGPT for that query despite being a newer market entrant.

How to structure each entry in the listicle:

- Business name as a heading
- One-line summary of what they do and who they serve
- Years in business and licensing status
- Specialties or unique strengths
- Google rating and review count
- Best for: what kind of homeowner this business is the right fit for

Topic Domination for
Local Trades

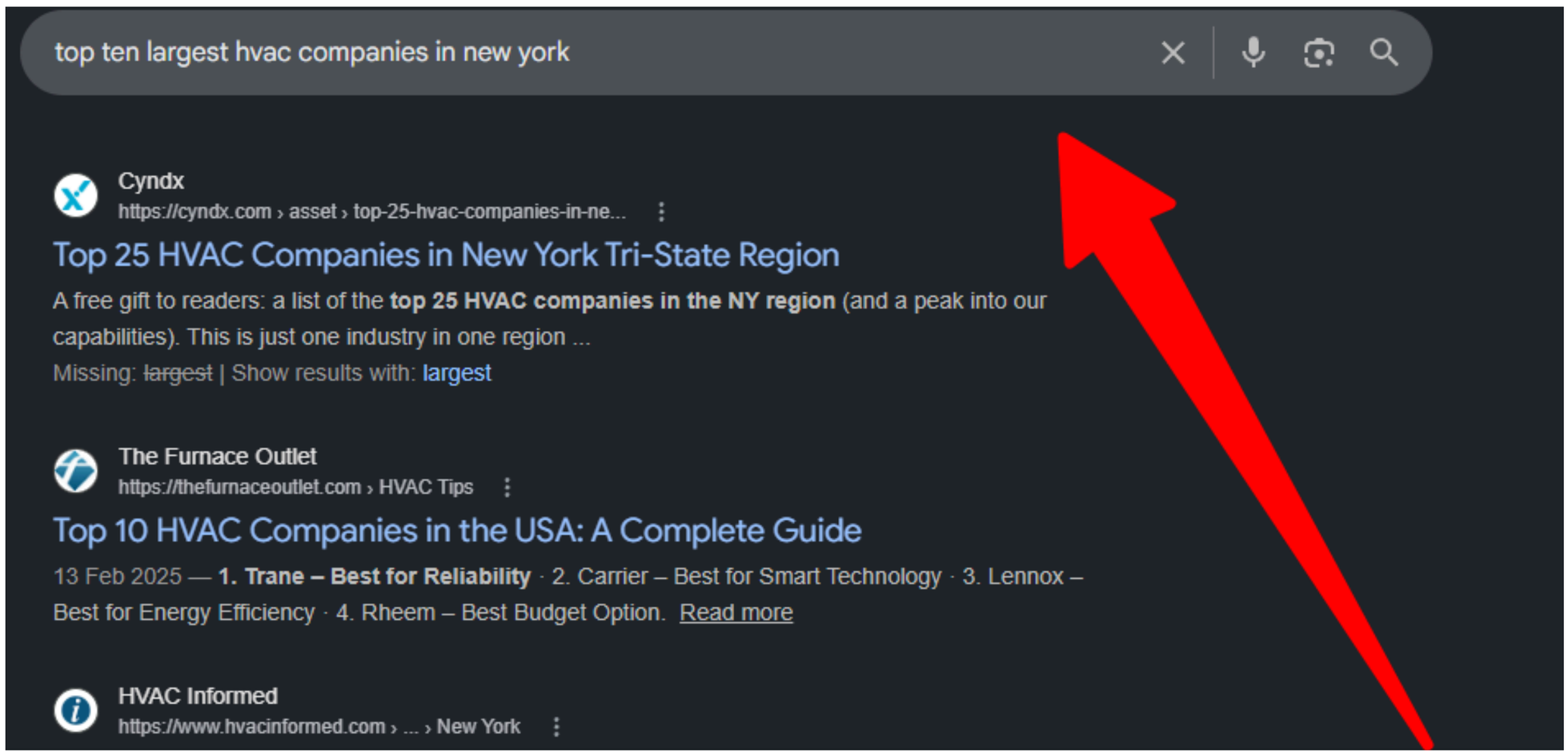
For an HVAC/Plumbing business, build these four listicles:

- Top 10 HVAC Companies in [City]
- Top 10 AC Repair Companies in [City]
- Top 10 Furnace Installation Companies in [City]
- Top 10 Emergency HVAC Companies in [City]

Each targets a different query cluster and adds another AI citation source. One listicle is a start. Four is a strategy.

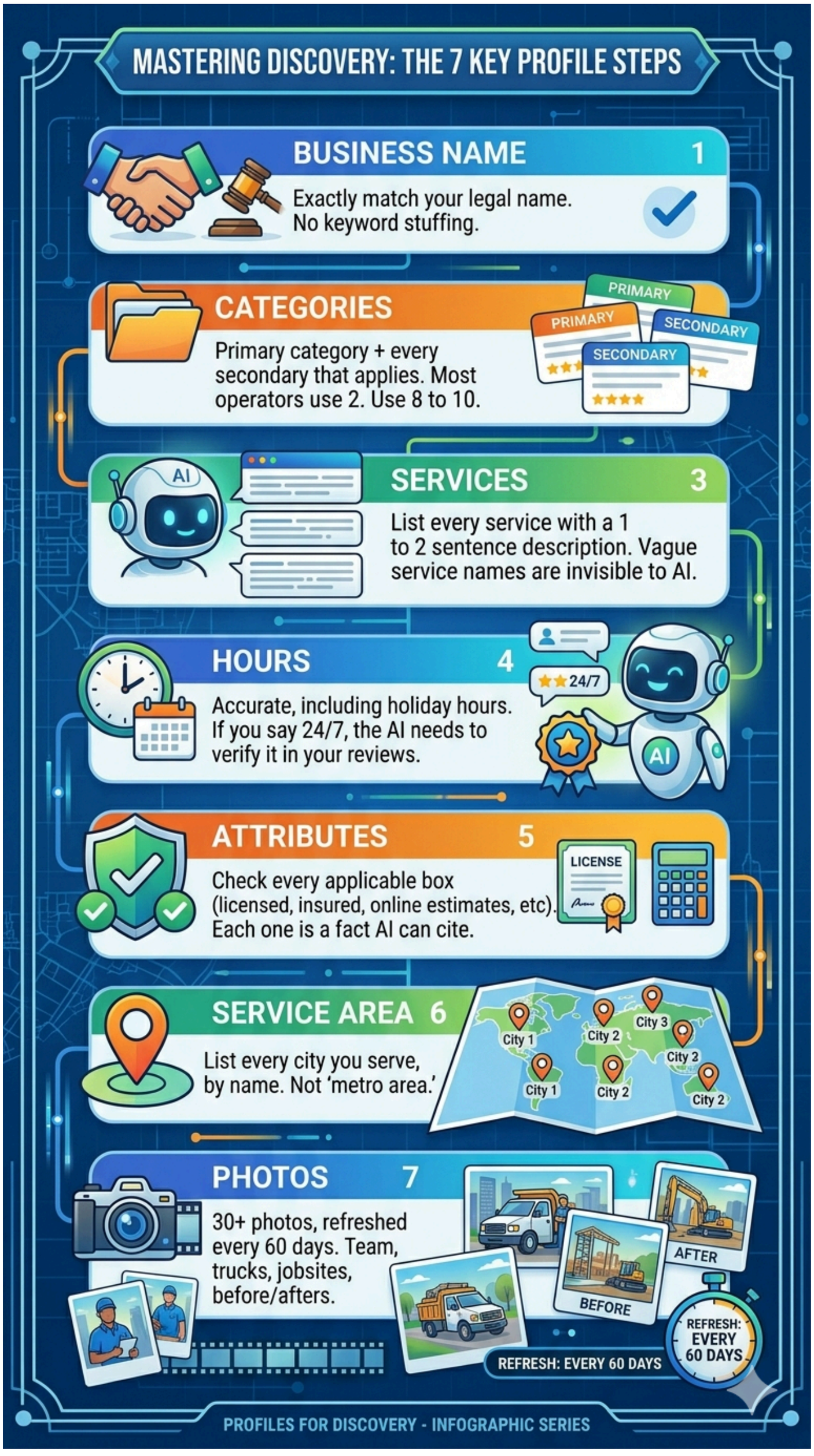
Your Google Business Profile Is Now an AI Ranking Factor

Google AI Overviews pull directly from GBP data when answering local service queries. ChatGPT pulls from sources that pull from GBP. Optimizing your GBP is now the single highest-leverage AI move for local home service businesses. Most operators set it up once years ago and never touched it again.



Topic Domination for
Local Trades

Most operators set up their GBP once in 2019 and never touched it again. Fix that this week.



Topic Domination for
Local Trades

The 30-day GBP sprint

If you do nothing else from this guide this month, run this sprint:

1. Week 1: Audit all 8 fields. Fix anything wrong or missing.
2. Week 2: Add 8 to 10 self-posted Q&A. Add 20+ new photos.
3. Week 3: Launch a review request system. Target 10 new reviews this month.
4. Week 4: Publish 4 GBP Posts. Re-run the page 7 audit and measure.

This sprint alone shifts AI visibility for most home service businesses within 60 days.

Third-Party Citations That Feed AI

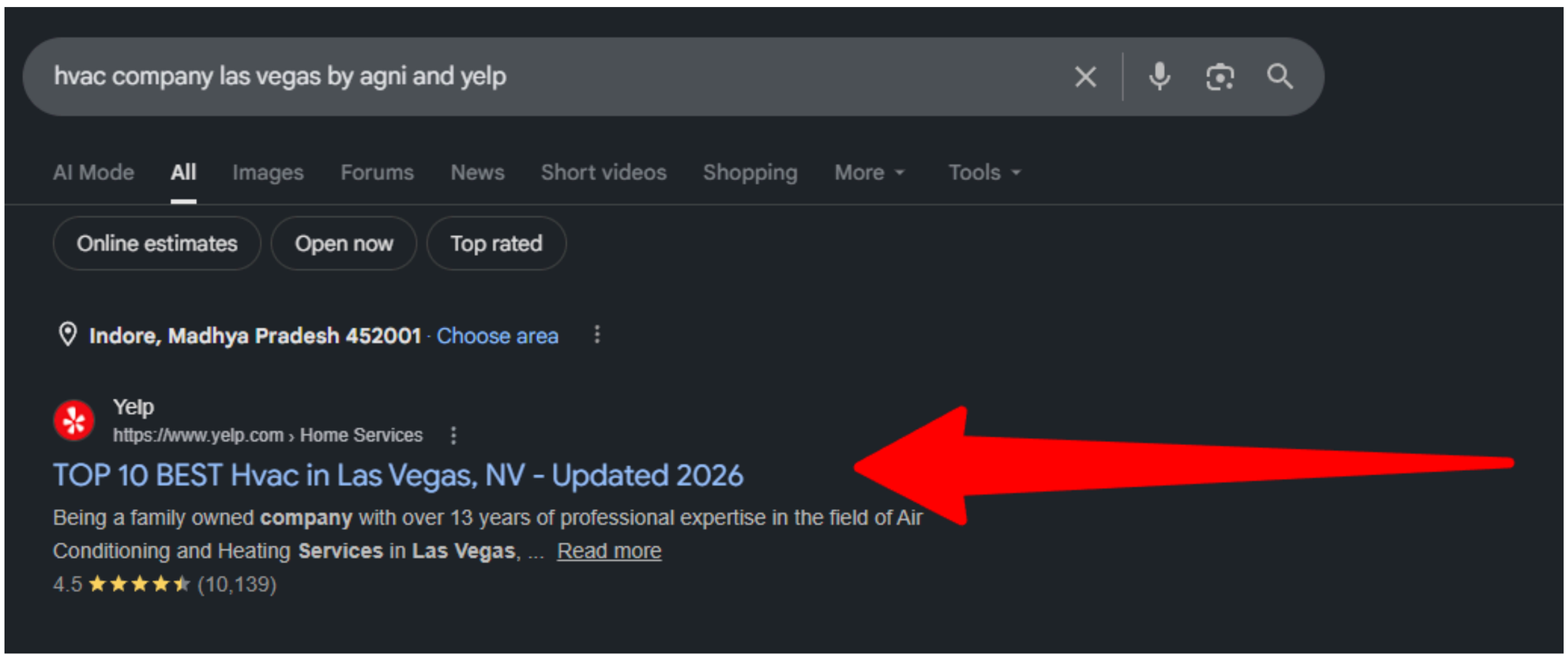
ChatGPT pulls from sources Bing trusts. Google AI Overviews pull from sources Google trusts. Both heavily weight third-party directories and review platforms because those sources are independently maintained, well-structured, and full of verified business data.

If your business is missing from these platforms, AI is missing a major signal that you exist.

Topic Domination for
Local Trades

The 6 platforms that matter most for home service

Platform	What to do
Angie (Angi)	Cited heavily by ChatGPT for "best [trade] in [city]" queries. Free profile is enough.
Yelp	Still a major AI citation source despite reputation issues. Optimize the profile.
HomeGuide	Newer but climbing fast in AI citations for home service. Free listing.
Better Homes	Specialty trades especially (remodel-adjacent HVAC/plumbing work).
BBB	Trust signal AI weights heavily for service businesses. Worth the membership fee.



Topic Domination for
Local Trades

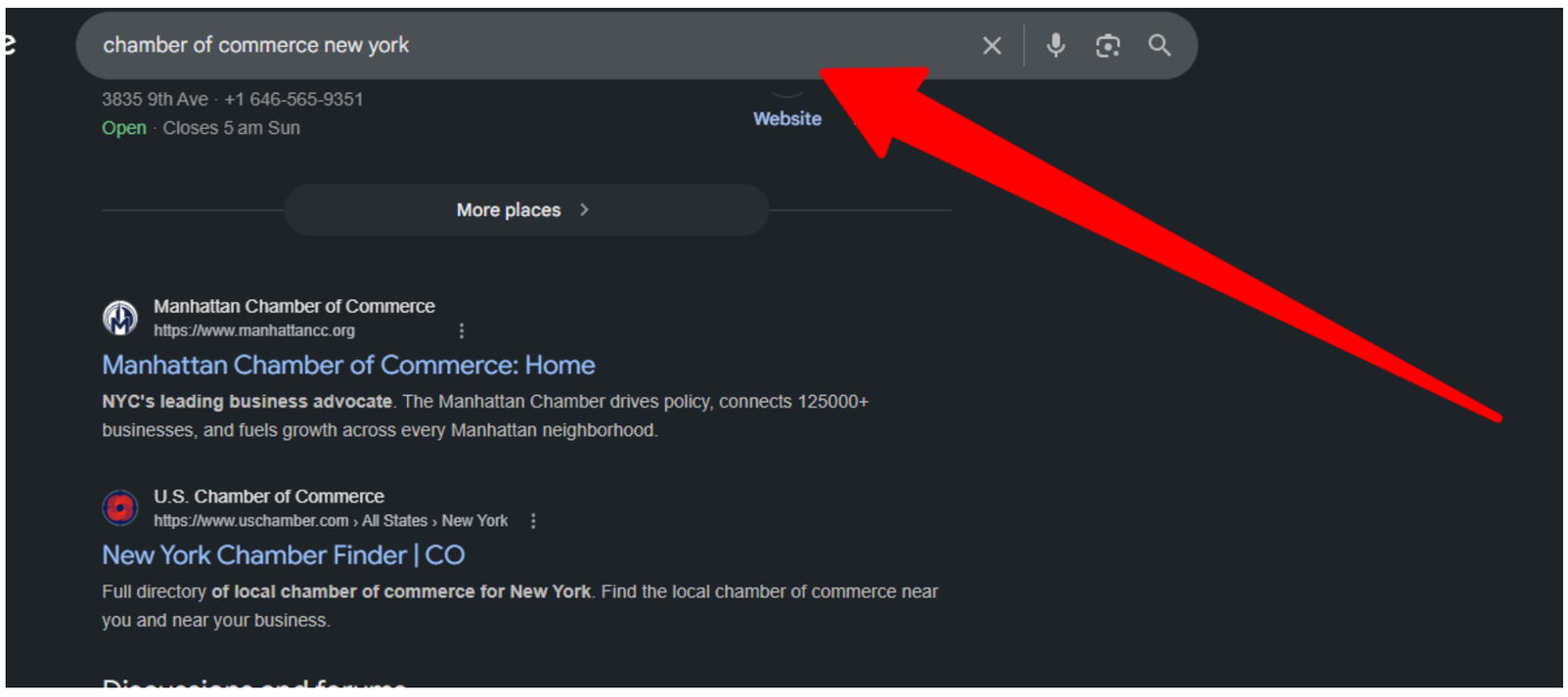
You do not need to be on every platform. You need to be on the 4 to 6 that get cited in your specific market. Run the page 7 audit and look at what ChatGPT references. The citation sources for your competitors are the platforms you need to be on.

The local angle most operators miss:

National directories matter, but local directories and local press carry more weight for local AI queries. AI heavily weights sources that signal "this business is established in this specific city." Look for:

- Your city's Chamber of Commerce directory
- Local "Best of [City]" annual awards from small newspapers and magazines
- Neighborhood association directories
- Local trade publication mentions
- City government contractor lists

A mention in a local city magazine's "Best of" HVAC list beats most national directory mentions for local AI queries.



YouTube: The
Underrated AI Feeder

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YouTube is owned by Google. ChatGPT and Perplexity both cite YouTube heavily. And almost no home service business in your market is publishing video content. That gap is your opportunity.

You do not need to become a YouTube creator. You need 10 to 20 short videos that exist on the platform, optimized for the right keywords, with transcripts AI can read.

YouTube: The *Underrated AI Feeder*

Why AI cites YouTube specifically

LLMs do not watch videos. They read the transcripts. A YouTube video with a clear, keyword-rich transcript is functionally a citable text source that happens to also be a video. This is the single most important thing to understand about YouTube SEO in 2026.

That means:

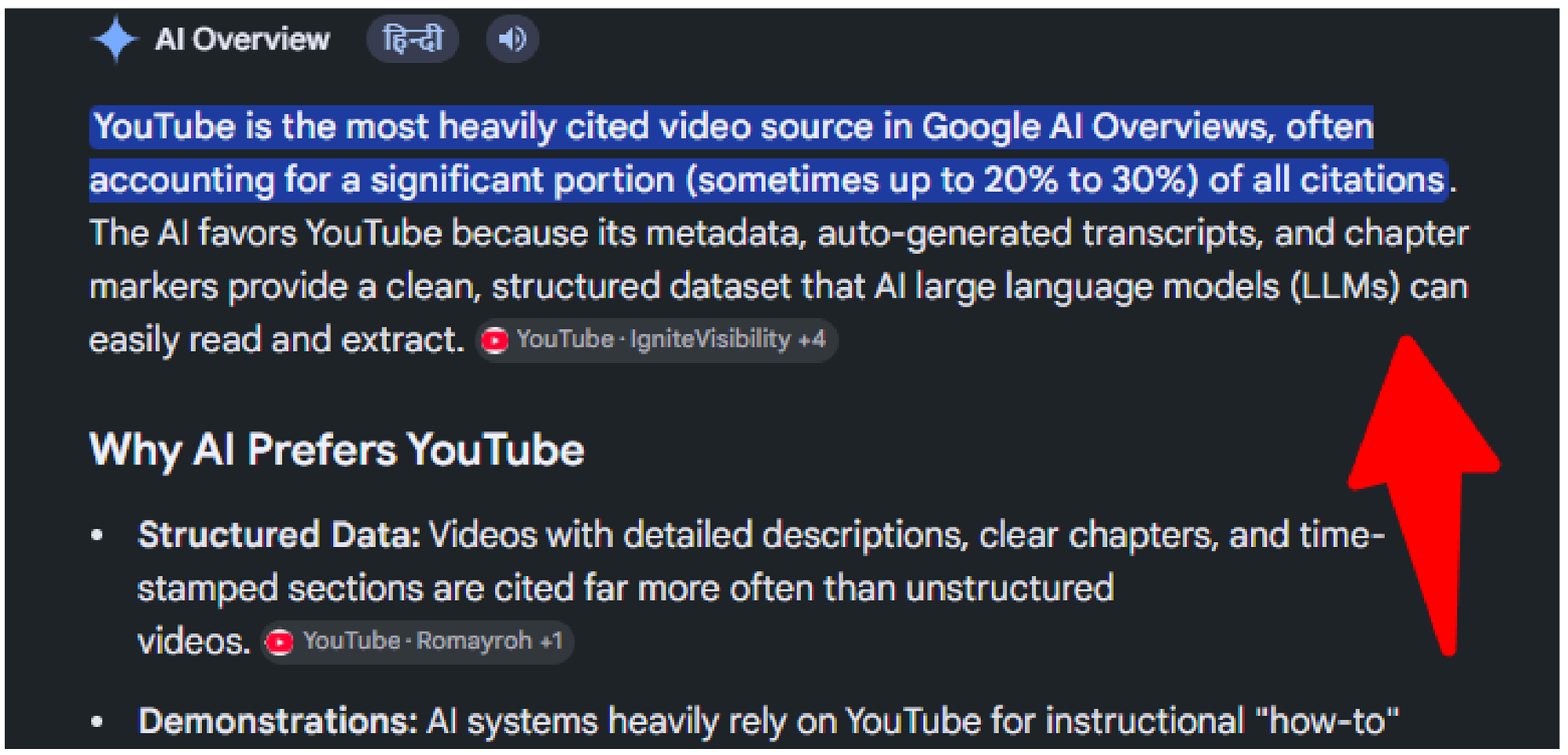
- What you say in the video matters more than how it looks
- Whether you mention your city, service, and credentials by name decides whether AI cites you
- A 90-second iPhone clip with a strong transcript outperforms a polished 10-minute production with weak language

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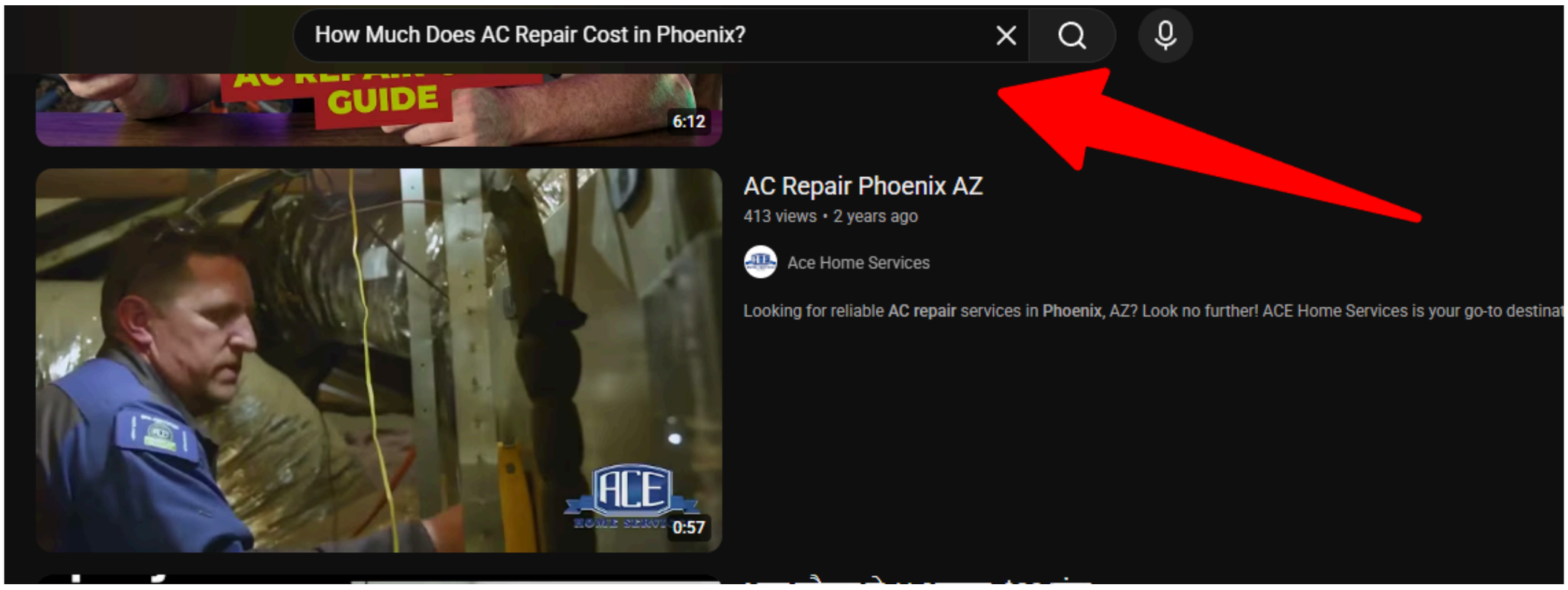
YouTube: The *Underrated AI Feeder*

What Videos to Make

Match your video topics to the same query clusters you're targeting with your website content. For an HVAC business in Phoenix, that looks like:

- "How Much Does AC Repair Cost in Phoenix? (2026 Price Guide)"
- "Furnace Repair vs. Replacement, What Phoenix Homeowners Need to Know"
- "How Long Does AC Installation Take in Phoenix?"
- "Top Signs Your Heat Pump Needs Repair in Phoenix"
- "What to Expect from an HVAC Tune-Up in Phoenix"

Each video targets a different query, builds a different citation source, and compounds over time. Aim for 10 videos before worrying about views or subscribers.



How to optimize a *YouTube video for AI*

- Title: Include your service + city + intent. "How Much Does AC Repair Cost in Phoenix? (2026 Price Guide)"

- Description: First 2 to 3 lines repeat the title intent. Mention your business name, location, and a phone number.

- Transcript: YouTube auto-generates one, but the auto version misses words. Upload your own. AI reads what is in the transcript file.

- Chapters: Break long videos into chapters with timestamps. AI parses chapters as structural signals.

- Tags: Add 5 to 10 tags covering service, city, and related queries.

- Pinned comment: Repeat your business name, service area, and phone number in a pinned comment.

The first 30 seconds of audio matter most. State your full business name, your city, and your specific service clearly. Vague openers ("hey guys, today we're going to talk about HVAC") get less citation weight than direct openers ("Acme HVAC in Phoenix, serving Maricopa County. Today: what AC repair actually costs in 2026").

Reddit, Forums &
Social Proof at Scale

ChatGPT cites Reddit more than almost any other source on the open web. Perplexity does too. For local home service queries, a single Reddit thread recommending your business can drive AI citations for months.

Reddit, Forums & *Social Proof at Scale*

Why AI loves Reddit

AI search systems were trained heavily on Reddit because the platform is full of real people answering real questions in their own words. When ChatGPT answers "who's a good HVAC company in Phoenix," it often pulls directly from r/Phoenix threads where actual homeowners recommended specific businesses.

This is uniquely valuable for two reasons:

Reddit is hard to fake. Communities downvote and report spam ruthlessly. AI weights Reddit highly precisely because the recommendations come pre-filtered by real people who hate marketing. A Reddit mention carries more trust weight than almost any directory listing.

Reddit has city-specific subreddits. r/Phoenix, r/Dallas, r/Atlanta, every major metro has one, plus many neighborhood-level communities. Local recommendations in these threads get exactly the city-specific visibility AI looks for when answering local queries.

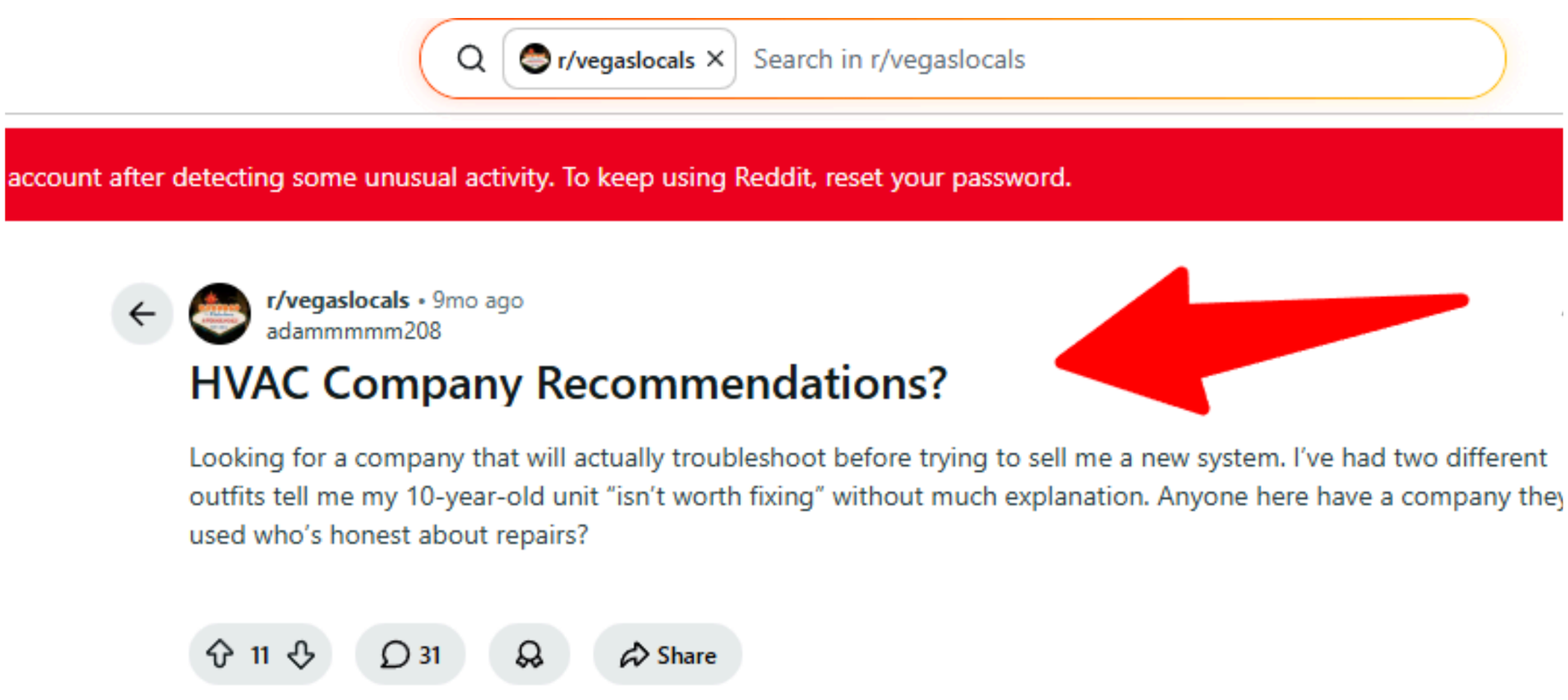
Reddit, Forums &
Social Proof at Scale

The right way to use Reddit
Three approaches that actually work:

1. Genuinely participate as the owner. Create an account with a username clearly identifying you (e.g., MikeAcmeHVAC). Mention you own an HVAC business in your bio. Then answer technical questions across r/HVACadvice, r/homeimprovement, your city subreddit, and similar communities. No pitching. Just helpful answers.

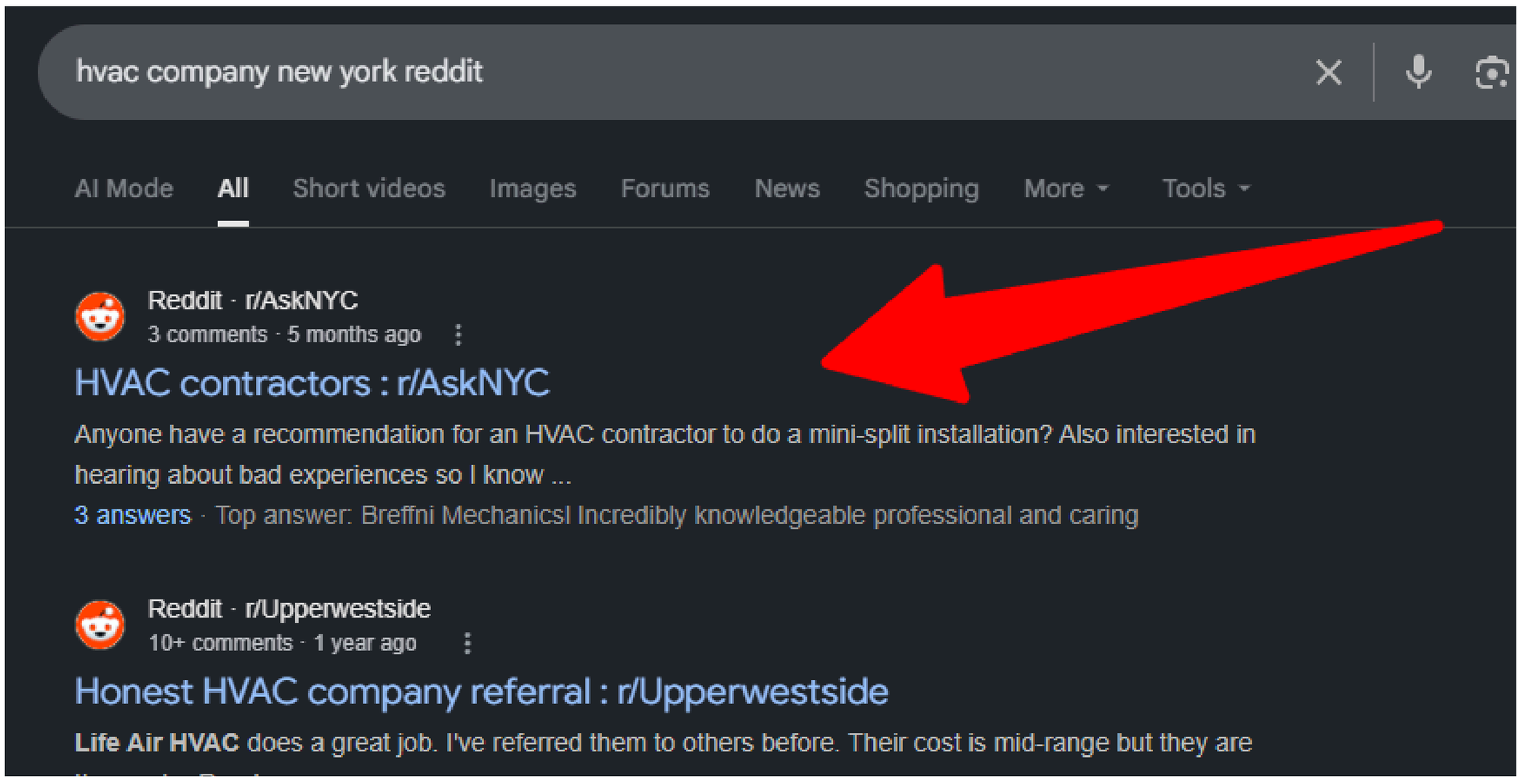
After 3 to 6 months of useful contributions, when a homeowner in your city posts "any recommendations for HVAC in [city]?", other users will sometimes vouch for you. That third-party recommendation is the AI citation gold.

2. Answer technical questions in detail. Long, detailed answers to common homeowner questions ("why is my AC freezing up," "should I repair or replace my 15-year-old furnace") get upvoted, saved, and cited. Build a body of helpful answers and Reddit will surface you for related questions across the platform.



Reddit, Forums &
Social Proof at Scale

3. Pay attention to your competitors' mention threads. Search Reddit for "[Competitor Name] [Your City]" and see what people say about them. If competitors are getting recommended in threads, those same threads are AI citation sources. You cannot insert yourself, but you can run the same playbook in adjacent threads.



Backlinks Still Matter *in 2026*

The One Thing Every Legitimate AI SEO Expert Agrees On

Backlinks remain a core ranking signal for AI search. ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google AI Overviews all weight authority signals heavily, and backlinks are still the strongest authority signal on the web. If your business has no backlinks from credible sources, AI has no way to know you're an established player in your market.

Why AI weights backlinks

ChatGPT doesn't use Google's PageRank algorithm directly, but it cites businesses whose websites Google ranks well, and Google rankings depend heavily on backlinks.

There's also evidence that ChatGPT and Perplexity maintain whitelists of trusted domains they treat as authoritative. The domains on those whitelists almost always have strong backlink profiles.

The chain is simple: Backlinks → Google rankings → AI citations. No part of that chain can be skipped.

Backlinks Still Matter *in 2026*

The local angle most operators miss

Generic backlink building (guest posts on random blogs, directory submissions) used to work and now does almost nothing. Local backlinks matter most for local AI queries.

Pursue:

- Local news mentions (charity events, community involvement, hiring announcements)
- Local sponsorship pages (youth sports teams, community events, local nonprofits, every sponsored event has a website with a sponsor list)
- Local "best of" awards (apply for them, win one, link from it)
- Local business association memberships (Chamber of Commerce, BNI, trade associations)

These are slower to build than buying links, but they outperform paid links for local AI citations by a wide margin.

The 10 Mistakes That

Kill AI Visibility

The local angle most operators miss- Generic backlink building (guest posts on random blogs, directory submissions)



The Bottom
Line

AI search is not a tactic. It is the new reality.

A homeowner in 2026 asks ChatGPT before she Googles. She reads an AI Overview before she scrolls. She gets a Perplexity recommendation before she compares quotes. In every search, an AI is deciding whether your business gets named.

If you are not in the answer, you are not in the conversation.

The trap to avoid

Most AI SEO advice in 2026 is hype. "Rank in ChatGPT in 24 hours." "AI overview hacks." "Bypass Google entirely." None of it survives contact with reality.

The truth: AI search rewards the same operators classic SEO has always rewarded. Real businesses. Real reviews. Real authority. Real content. The work compounds, but it does not skip.

One last thing

The operators winning AI search in your city right now are the ones who started 12 months ago. The operators winning a year from now are the ones who start this week. That is the deal. The rest is up to you.

The Bottom
Line

Don't wait 12 months to fix your AI visibility.

If you want to claim your market's top recommendation before your competitors wake up, let’s build your foundation together. Book a strategy call today, and we'll help you. https://calendly.com/yashsinghblogger