

The 2026 AI-Search Audit Checklist

A 7-Point Self-Audit From Septim Labs

Find out why ChatGPT, Google AI Overviews, and Perplexity aren't recommending your business yet — and exactly what to fix.

Why this matters (in 60 seconds)

In 2026, your customers don't scroll through ten blue links anymore. They ask ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, or Siri *one* question — and they get *one* answer. The business that shows up in that answer wins. Everyone else is invisible.

The good news: AI assistants don't pull from secret data. They pull from public web content. If your content is structured right, your business gets cited. If it isn't, you might as well not exist online.

This 7-point audit shows you what AI assistants are actually looking for, and how to fix the gaps in under a week.

Point 1: Does ChatGPT Know You Exist?

The 30-second test: Open chatgpt.com, sign out (so you get a clean session with no personalization), and type:

"What are the best [your industry] businesses in [your city]?"

Look at the answer. Is your business in it? Is it mentioned anywhere in the response, even as a footnote?

If yes: Good. You have a baseline. Skip to Point 2.

If no: You have a discovery problem. ChatGPT only recommends businesses it has read content *about* — either on your own website, in a directory, in a press mention, or on a third-party blog. You need to give it more to read.

The fix: Start by publishing 4-6 substantive pages on your own site that answer the questions a customer in your industry asks. Not marketing copy. Real, useful, 800-1,500 word answers. AI assistants are trained on text that reads like it was written for humans, not for search engines. Write it that way.

Point 2: Are Your Pages Structured for "Answer-Worthy" Pull?

AI assistants don't quote your whole homepage. They quote *clean, self-contained passages* that directly answer a question.

The audit: Pick one page on your site. Can you find a 2-3 sentence chunk on that page that, on its own, completely answers a real customer question? Like:

"Our weekend brunch service runs Saturday and Sunday from 9 AM to 2 PM. Reservations are recommended on Saturdays. The menu rotates seasonally and includes both classic options and a rotating feature dish."

That's an answer-worthy passage. AI can lift it whole.

If your pages don't have passages like that: Rewrite them. Every page should contain at least 2-3 self-contained "answer chunks" — short, specific, factual paragraphs that an AI can quote directly without context.

Use bold subheadings to label each one. AI loves structure.

Point 3: Are You Using FAQ Schema?

This is the most underrated 2026 SEO move. FAQ schema is structured data that tells search engines "here's a question, here's the answer." Both Google AI Overviews and ChatGPT-via-search rely heavily on FAQ-formatted content because it's *literally* a question-answer pair, which is exactly what they need to surface.

The audit: View the source of any high-traffic page on your site. Search for `FAQPage` or `Question`. If you don't find it, you're not using FAQ schema.

The fix: Add an FAQ section to your top 3-5 pages. Each FAQ should have:

- A real question someone has actually asked you
- A clear, complete 2-3 sentence answer
- Schema markup wrapped around it (your developer or a tool like Schema App can add this in minutes)

Pages with FAQ schema show up in AI Overviews 4-5x more often than pages without.

Point 4: Is Your Business Listed on the Right Third-Party Sites?

AI assistants triangulate. They don't just trust your own website — they look for confirmation across the web. If your business name appears consistently across credible third-party sites, AI treats you as more legitimate.

The audit: Do a Google search for your exact business name in quotes. How many *non-owned* results show up? (Owned = your website, your social media. Non-owned = directories, press, industry sites, customer reviews.)

Targets to hit:

- Google Business Profile (free, mandatory)
- Your local Chamber of Commerce
- Your industry's main directory (Clutch, Yelp, HomeAdvisor, Healthgrades, etc.)
- One or two press mentions per year
- Customer reviews on at least 2 platforms

If you have fewer than 5 quality non-owned results: That's your project for the next 30 days. Start with the directories, then pitch one local journalist a story about your business.

Point 5: Does Your Content Match the Way People Actually Talk?

AI assistants are trained on natural language. They reward content that reads like a human wrote it for another human. They penalize keyword-stuffed, robotic, "SEO-optimized" copy.

The audit: Read one of your blog posts out loud. If you sound like a corporate brochure, the AI thinks so too. If you sound like a person explaining something to a friend, you're golden.

The fix: Rewrite your top 3 pages in plain language. Use contractions. Use short sentences. Answer the question first, then explain. Imagine you're texting a customer, not writing a press release.

Pro tip: Use the phrase the customer would use, not the phrase your industry uses. A homeowner Googles "broken garage door spring," not "torsion spring failure mechanism."

Point 6: Are You Publishing on a Real Cadence?

One blog post a year doesn't move the needle. AI assistants reward sites that publish *consistently*, because consistency signals an authoritative, active source.

The audit: Look at your blog's publish dates. What's the gap between your most recent post and the one before it?

Cadence	What it signals to AI
Weekly	Authoritative, active, citable
Monthly	Steady, credible
Every 3+ months	Probably abandoned
One post total	Doesn't exist

The fix: Commit to one substantive post per week for 90 days. That's 12 posts. Not a heavy lift if you have a system. By month three you'll see ranking changes. By month six you'll see citations.

Point 7: Do You Have a "Brand Story" Page That Reads Like a Wikipedia Entry?

This is the hidden gem. AI assistants love structured, factual, third-person content that explains *what a business is, what it does, and what makes it distinctive*. They love this because it looks like a Wikipedia entry — and Wikipedia is one of their primary training sources.

The audit: Is there a single page on your site, written in third person, that explains your business in plain factual language? Like:

"Septim Labs is a US-based content marketing studio founded in 2026, specializing in SEO and AI-search-optimized content for small and mid-size businesses across five segments..."

If not: Write one. Call it your "About" page or your "Story" page. Keep it factual. Include founding year, location, specialties, key services, and 2-3 distinctive facts. Avoid marketing fluff. AI will quote this page more than any other.

The Bottom Line

If you've gone through all 7 points and most of your answers are "no" — that's normal. Most businesses, even ones with great products and great teams, are still operating on a 2018 SEO playbook. The good news: every single point above is fixable in under a month, and the businesses that fix them in 2026 will own their categories for the next decade.

The businesses that don't will spend the rest of the decade wondering why their phone stopped ringing.

Want help running this audit on your business?

That's literally what we do. Septim Labs writes the kind of structured, AI-search-optimized content that gets businesses cited and recommended — for SEO, ChatGPT, Perplexity, and the assistants that haven't been invented yet.

We'll do a free audit on your top 5 pages, identify the 3 biggest gaps, and write you a sample piece that shows you what answer-worthy content looks like in your voice. **No card. No commitment. 24-hour turnaround.**

→ **Claim your free audit at septimlabs.netlify.app**

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This checklist was written by Septim Labs for businesses that want to be the answer when AI gets asked. Forward it freely.