INDUSTRY REPORT

AI SEARCH OPTIMIZATION FOR LAW FIRMS

How ChatGPT picks a law firm.

We studied ChatGPT, five other AI assistants and 155,630 citations to show which law firms get named, why, and what those firms have in common.

THE ONE SENTENCE

A law firm can spend thirty years building a reputation and be introduced by an AI assistant in three sentences it did not write, assembled from sources it has never checked, against criteria it has never seen.

14,548

AI answers to legal questions

May to September 2026. AI read 14,020 word for word.

81,017

Times AI named a lawyer or firm to hire

About six in a typical answer

~2,000

Individual lawyers the AI named

Named personally, not just by firm

~2,500

Law firm websites the AI used as sources

Directories and news sites not counted

THE SIX PLATFORMS MEASURED

ChatGPT · Claude · Perplexity · Gemini · Grok · Google AI Overviews

THE SHORT VERSION

What AI reads when it picks a lawyer.

We recorded 14,548 answers from six AI assistants to the questions people ask when they need a lawyer. Four findings stand out, and each one points to work a firm can do now.

62%

Legal directories are where AI finds lawyers.

62% of AI answers with sources cited a legal directory. When AI cited a directory's list of lawyers, the firms on that list were named three times as often as the firms missing from it.

5

Each AI has its own favorite directories.

Five directories cover the top two of every AI: Super Lawyers, Justia, Avvo, Expertise.com and OnTopList.

70%

AI reads practice pages, not blog posts.

70% of the law firm pages AI cited were practice area or city pages. On ChatGPT, blog posts were 0.5% of the firm pages it cited.

60%

ChatGPT checks the state bar.

ChatGPT cited a state bar website in 60% of its answers with sources, four times as often as any other AI. The page it cited most there was a lawyer's own bar profile.

WHAT A FIRM CAN DO

- Find the directory lists AI cites for your city and practice, starting with the five above, and get the firm on each one, using each directory's own process.
- Make every practice area and city page say what the firm handles, where, and who handles it.
- Check every lawyer's state bar profile: firm name, address, phone and website.

Source: Faneros research. 14,548 answers from six AI assistants, May to September 2026.

WHERE THE NAMES COME FROM

Directories tell AI who exists. Websites tell it what to say.

Before an AI assistant can recommend a lawyer, it needs to know who practices in that city. Legal directories were one of every five sources the AI cited, and they showed up in most answers that cited anything. Law firm websites were about half. The pattern is simple: directories supply the names, and websites supply the description.

21%
of everything AI cited was a legal directory
32,696 of 155,630 citations

62%
of answers with sources cited a directory
At least one, across all six AI platforms

2x
Legal directories are getting more important to AI
14% of citations in June, 29% by Sept.

The directories AI cited most

Citations across all six AI platforms, May to September 2026

Being on the list is what counts

When an AI answer cited a directory's list of lawyers for a city and practice, the firms on that list were named three times as often as the firms missing from it.

Share of those answers that named the firm. Measured on the law firms in our study, 2,066 answers. A strong link, not a guarantee.

WHAT A FIRM CAN DO

Find the directory list pages AI cites for the firm's city and practice. Check whether the firm is on each one. Then use each directory's own process to get listed or to fix the profile.

Source: Faneros research. 14,548 AI answers and 155,630 citations, May to September 2026.

THE DIRECTORIES EACH AI READS

Most AI answers check a directory. Each AI checks different ones.

Four of the six AI assistants cited a legal directory in most of their answers, and each had its own favorites. Five directories cover every AI's top two. On the same questions asked again later in the summer, directories took a bigger share of what AI cited.

83%

of Perplexity answers cited a legal directory

Grok 77%, Gemini 71%, Claude 58%

5

directories cover the top two of every AI

Super Lawyers, Justia, Avvo, Expertise.com and OnTopList

45%

of Grok's directory citations went to Super Lawyers

Claude's favorite: Expertise.com, 28%

Each AI and the directories it cited most

All questions, May to September 2026. Directory shares are of that AI's own directory citations.

AI ASSISTANT	ANSWERS CITING A DIRECTORY	ITS TOP TWO DIRECTORIES	
Perplexity	83.5%	Super Lawyers 19%	Justia 18%
Grok	77.1%	Super Lawyers 45%	Avvo 14%
Gemini	70.8%	Super Lawyers 25%	Justia 18%
Claude	58.4%	Expertise.com 28%	OnTopList 16%
Google AI Overviews	38.3%	Super Lawyers 39%	Justia 27%
ChatGPT	37.2%	Super Lawyers 24%	Avvo 19%

WHAT A FIRM CAN DO

Start with the five directories that cover every AI's top two. Check the firm's listing on each, and use each directory's own process to get on its list for your city and practice.

Source: Faneros research, May to September 2026. Answers with sources on each AI platform.

WHAT AI READS ON A FIRM'S WEBSITE

AI reads the practice pages. Blog posts barely register.

Nine in ten AI answers with sources cited a law firm's own website, and most cited a directory too, because one answer cites many sources at once. On firm websites, AI cited practice area and city pages most. Blog posts, bios and review pages were ~3%.

The average AI answer cited 11 sources

6 law firm website pages

2 directory pages

3 other sources

Averages over 13,702 answers that cited sources: 5.7, 2.4 and 3.2.

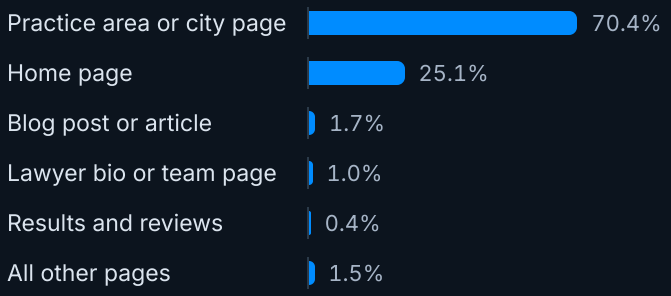
57%

of AI answers with sources cited both a law firm website and a directory

7,842 of 13,702 answers

Which pages AI cited on law firm websites

64,782 pages, five AI platforms. Gemini names sites, not pages.



70%

were practice area or city pages

45,608 of 64,782 law firm pages

On ChatGPT, even fewer blog posts

6,202 law firm pages ChatGPT cited

53 times

as many ChatGPT citations went to firm home pages as to firm blog posts

1,529 home page citations, 29 blog post citations

WHAT A FIRM CAN DO

Make every practice area page and city page say plainly what the firm handles, where, and which lawyers handle it. Those are the pages the AI reads.

Source: Faneros research. 13,702 AI answers that cited sources, May to September 2026. A law firm website here is a web address with a legal word such as law, attorney or injury; firm sites without one count as other sources.

WHAT AI SAYS ABOUT THE FIRMS IT PICKS

AI doesn't care how big you are. It cares if you fit the question.

When AI named a firm to hire, it said why 94% of the time. The reasons were about fit: the kind of case, the place, the years. Reviews and firm size barely came up, and awards only 1 in 5.

79%
said what kind of case the firm handles
56% said where the firm is

1 in 5
mentioned any award or rating
21.4% of the 81,017 picks

2.5%
mentioned the firm's size or resources
Fewer than 3 picks in 100

What the reasons said

Share of the 81,017 picks. A pick can give several reasons.

FIT: DOES THIS FIRM MATCH THE QUESTION?

REPUTATION: HOW IMPRESSIVE IS THE FIRM?

These are the reasons AI gave. They show what AI says about a firm, not proof of how it chose.

What SEO sells, and how often AI cared

Search advice leans on blogs, awards and authority signals

0.5%
of the law firm pages ChatGPT cited were blog posts (29 of 6,202)

21%
of picks mentioned an award or rating

4.6%
of picks mentioned client reviews

WHAT A FIRM CAN DO

Write for the question, not for Google's checklist: a page for each kind of case in each place the firm serves, with its years, results and fees. Awards probably can't hurt, but AI talked about fit nearly four times as often.

Source: Faneros research. 81,017 times AI named a lawyer or firm to hire, in 14,020 answers read in full, May to September 2026.

THE LAWYERS AI NAMES

AI names your lawyers. It reads about them in directories.

More than half of AI's answers named a lawyer, not just a firm. For lawyers it leaned on directory awards and bar credentials; the firm's own bio pages barely showed up.

57%
of answers named a lawyer
~2,000 different lawyers

3.6x
as likely to name a directory
31% for a lawyer, 8.6% for a firm

1%
of cited firm pages were lawyer bios
624 of 64,782 pages

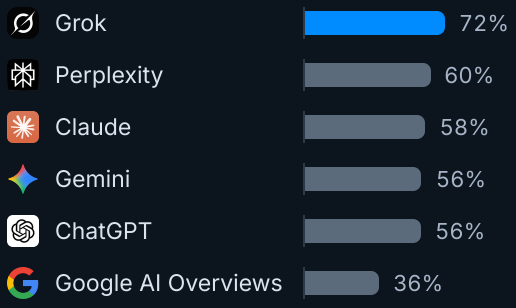
What AI said when it named a lawyer

Share of picks whose reasons mentioned each, lawyer against firm

These are the reasons AI gave. They show what AI says about a lawyer, not proof of how it chose.

Answers that named a lawyer

Share of each AI's answers



WHAT A FIRM CAN DO

Give every lawyer a complete directory profile and a current state bar profile, with their awards, certifications and past roles. That is where AI reads about them.

Source: Faneros research. 14,020 answers read in full, May to September 2026. Lawyers counted once each, spellings merged.

NATIONAL FIRMS AGAINST LOCAL ONES

The biggest names in injury law got ~1% of AI's picks.

The national firms with ads everywhere barely registered. AI spread its picks across thousands of firms, and almost all of them were local firms it named in one state only.

1 in 100

picks went to a national firm

Firms AI picked in three or more states: 1.2% at most

94%

went to firms picked in one state

Local firms, 81,017 picks in all

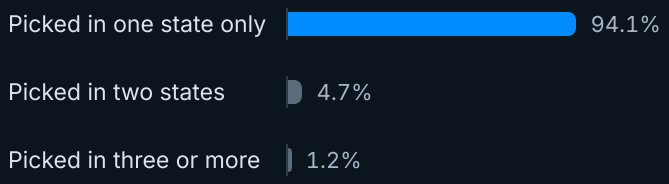
0.5%

for the one firm picked in all five states

The biggest national name: 409 picks

Where AI's picks went

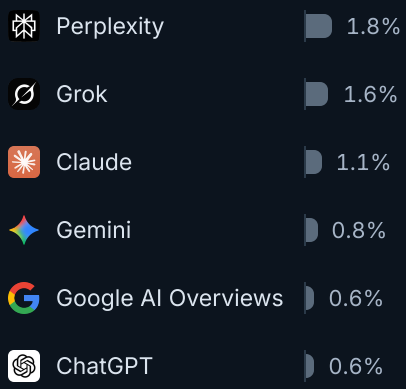
Share of the 81,017 picks, by how many of the five states AI picked the firm in



Firms are matched by name across spellings. Two local firms that share a surname can count as one, which only makes the national share look bigger.

Picks that went to a national firm

Share of each AI's picks



No AI gave national firms even 2% of its picks.

WHAT A FIRM CAN DO

You do not need a national ad budget to win here. Be the obvious local fit: pages for each case you handle in each city you serve, and the directory lists for your city.

Source: Faneros research. 81,017 times AI named a lawyer or firm to hire, in five states, May to September 2026.

WHAT CHATGPT READS THAT OTHERS DON'T

ChatGPT checks the state bar. No other AI comes close.

ChatGPT cited a state bar website in most of its answers, and more often than any other AI in every market we measured. Grok was a distant second; the other four almost never did. On the bar's site, ChatGPT cited lawyers' own bar profiles most of all.

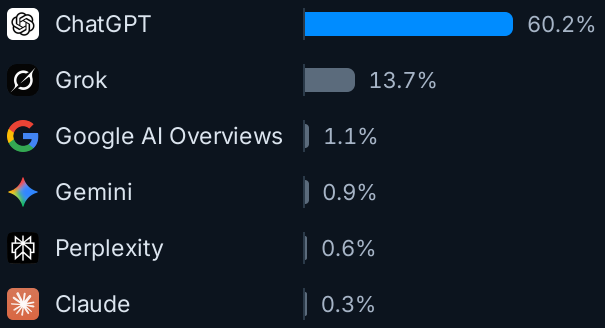
60%
of ChatGPT answers with sources cited a state bar website
1,394 of 2,317 answers

4x
as often as any other AI
ChatGPT 60.2%. The next closest, Grok, 13.7%

1,028
times ChatGPT cited a lawyer's own bar profile
Out of 2,595 ChatGPT citations of state bar websites

Answers that cited a state bar website

Share of each AI's answers with sources, all questions



What ChatGPT read on state bar websites

2,595 citations of state bar websites

A bar profile is the bar's public page for one lawyer: license status, firm, office address and phone.

WHAT A FIRM CAN DO

Check every lawyer's state bar profile and make sure the firm name, office address, phone and website are complete and current. If the bar runs a lawyer referral service, find out whether the firm is on it. Where the state certifies specialists, ChatGPT reads that list too.

Source: Faneros research, May to September 2026. State bars and state lawyer licensing boards only.

HOW THE FIX WORKS

40% of the time, no AI named the firm. Each miss needs its own fix.

A firm is not missing from one question. It is missing from dozens, and each one needs content aimed at that question, on the right page of its site and in the directories AI reads for it.

40%

of questions: no AI named the firm

714 of 1,771 questions asked without the firm's name

28 to 84

questions no AI ever named the firm on

Different questions, for each of the three firms we measured most

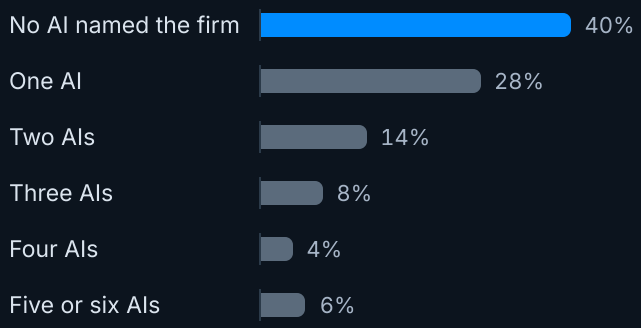
86%

of websites differed between two AIs

A fix aimed at one AI can miss the rest

How many AIs named the firm

Each question, asked of all six AIs. At least five answered.



Where the fix goes

What every AI reads, from pages 3 and 5

62%

of AI answers with sources cited a legal directory

70%

of the law firm pages AI cited were practice area or city pages

WHAT A FIRM CAN DO

The problem: dozens of questions where no AI names the firm, each needing its own fix.
The fix: use AI to write targeted content for every one, at scale, across the firm's website and its legal directory listings, then ask the same questions again to see what moved. Optimizing for AI search is one of the best uses of AI itself.

Source: Faneros research, May to September 2026. 1,771 questions asked without the firm's name, each answered by at least five AIs.

WHAT A FIRM CAN DO NEXT

Seven moves that get a firm named.

Everything in this paper, in the order we would do it. Each move comes from what the AI answers showed, and each one points to the page with the proof.

62%	**Get on the directory lists AI cites** 62% of AI answers with sources cited a legal directory. Start with Super Lawyers, Justia, Avvo, Expertise.com and OnTopList, and get on each one's list for your city and practice, using each directory's own process.	PAGES 3 AND 4
70%	**Build a page for every case, in every city** 70% of the law firm pages AI cited were practice area or city pages. Say what the firm handles, where, and who handles it.	PAGE 5
79%	**Write for fit, not fame** 79% of AI's reasons named the kind of case. Only 2.5% mentioned the firm's size, and 1 in 5 any award.	PAGE 6
60%	**Check every lawyer's state bar profile** 60% of ChatGPT's answers with sources cited a state bar website. Keep the firm name, address, phone and website current.	PAGE 9
3.6x	**Give every lawyer a full directory profile** 3.6x as likely to name a directory when AI named a lawyer. Put each lawyer's awards, certifications and past roles on it.	PAGE 7
1%	**Be the obvious local fit** 1% of AI's picks went to national firms. A local firm that fits the question wins without a national ad budget.	PAGE 8
40%	**Fix every question AI misses, at scale** 40% of questions: no AI named the firm. Use AI to write targeted content for each one, on the site and in the directories.	PAGE 10

What does AI say about your firm?

Source: Faneros research. 14,548 answers from six AI assistants, May to September 2026.

HOW WE DID THE RESEARCH

14,548 answers recorded.

Faneros asked six AI assistants the questions people ask when they need a lawyer, recorded every answer and every source, and had AI read the answers one by one.

14,548
AI answers recorded

6
AI assistants, asked the same questions

155,630
Citations recorded, every source each answer showed

81,017
Times AI named a lawyer or firm to hire

~2,000
Individual lawyers AI named

~2,500
Law firm websites AI used as sources

What we asked

The questions people ask an AI assistant when they need a lawyer, about personal injury, criminal defense and other practice areas. Most questions did not name any firm, the way a real person asks.

What we recorded

Every answer from the six AI assistants, and every source each answer cited, from May to September 2026. 525 answers had nothing in them: the AI service failed, or Google showed no AI Overview.

How we read the answers

A language model read 14,020 answers word for word and pulled out every lawyer and firm offered as an option and the reasons given for each. A second model checked the same work on 220 answers and agreed on 90% of the names.

How we counted

Every number in this paper was counted from the raw records, with spellings of the same lawyer or firm merged. The biggest numbers were checked again by a separate reviewer before they went on a page.

How to read the reasons

The reasons are what the AI said about each firm. They show what AI tells a person, not proof of how it chose.

Names

No lawyer or law firm is named in this paper. None has given permission, and the findings do not depend on any one of them.