

CLIENT RESEARCH BRIEF · WORKING DRAFT

GEOLOCAL Research Brief

Date: 2026-10-01

Branch: planning-selfserve-audit

Relationship: Append-only evidence layer for *Alternate business proposal: North Star via accurate AI presence*. Does not replace the product architecture SoT

(`SELF_SERVE_AI_DISCOVERABILITY_CONCEPT.md`). Labels: practitioner-reported · vendor · primary study · UNVERIFIED.

CONFIDENTIAL · WORKING DRAFT

RESEARCH BRIEF

Title: GEOLOCAL Research Brief — evidence behind North Star Presence + Recommendability

Date: 2026-10-01

Branch: planning-selfserve-audit

Relationship: Append-only evidence layer for this alternate proposal. Does not replace the concept SoT

(`SELF_SERVE_AI_DISCOVERABILITY_CONCEPT.md`). Labels below: **practitioner-reported** (r/localseo / agency anecdotes), **vendor** (product marketing or vendor research), **primary study** (named methodology / published research). Flag **UNVERIFIED** where community claim or secondary paraphrase lacks a clean primary cite.

Pain

Local owners and agencies are stuck between two scoreboards that do not agree.

1. **Maps / pack pain is familiar and call-dense.** Practitioners report large call and pack swings from GBP completeness, primary category, review velocity, and citation cleanup — but those wins are often Maps-lane attributions, not proof that ChatGPT / Perplexity / Gemini will name the shop correctly.
2. **AI pain is selective and accuracy-fragile.** Primary studies (SOCi LVI 2026, Insites Jul 2026, BrightLocal Local AI Visibility Study Sep 2026) show assistants recommend far fewer locations than the 3-Pack, disagree with each other, persist only ~half the time on re-prompt, and frequently misstate NAP even when they “know” the business.
3. **Owners cannot see the gap.** Localize Completeness, citation-count tools, and vibe-check prompt grids do not measure Presence (are you on the claim surfaces assistants lean on?) or Recommendability (would an assistant pick you *and* describe you accurately?). Selling “cleanup ROI” as if aggregator correction alone moves AI answers lacks published pack/call studies.

Practitioner snapshot (r/localseo; full thread fetch often blocked — treat as **practitioner-reported**, not replicated):

Claim (label)	Source thread (reddit)	Notes
~73% of shops invisible to 4+ of 6 AI engines (50-business observational audit)	1slake5	Practitioner-reported observational audit; small n; methodology not independently reviewed
15+ consistent listings claimed ~3× more likely to be recommended	same cluster / community commentary around 1slake5	Practitioner-reported ; correlation ≠ causation
GBP completeness 82 → 100% → calls 14 → 26/mo (~86%), visibility 40 → 70% in ~12 days	1r23zji	Practitioner-reported ; community pushback: may be reclassification / seasonality, not pure completeness lift
Primary category swap: page 2 → top 3 in ~3 weeks	1viqf8z	Practitioner-reported Maps/pack outcome
Delete ~40 bad citations: accuracy 74 → 98%, calls doubled ~6 weeks	1v7s2ae	Practitioner-reported ; no controlled AI re-prompt evidence in thread
GBP opt ~70% calls ~2 months; AI mentions stayed flat (comment)	1o08abp	Practitioner-reported ; useful as “Maps ≠ AI” anecdote
Reviews 11 → 34, page 2 → pack, calls doubled ~6 weeks; attribution fight (~80% reviews?)	1vn7vjv	Practitioner-reported ; heavy confounding
HVAC: review velocity as biggest lever	1vtlpki	Practitioner-reported vertical anecdote
Citations-only → top 8–15, not top 3	1m4woes	Practitioner-reported ; citations help floor, not crown
Yext “data hostage” / listings vanish when stop paying; Synup cancel fee ~\$1,980; Uberall enterprise-only	community threads (vendor pricing folklore)	Practitioner-reported / vendor-commercial; verify contracts case-by-case
DIY gets RESULT credit; paid pipes for scale past ~30 locations / 100+	community consensus	Product implication: ownership & tickets > hostage syndication
AI evidence thin vs Maps call evidence dense; ListingsAPI: no win case study	community meta	Aligns with BrightLocal / Insites gaps below

Pain for this proposal: the North Star fails when (a) the shop is missing from AI answers, (b) the shop is named but facts are wrong, or (c) the owner has no accuracy-aware audit + ticket path across Lane A umbrellas and Lane B majors.

What works (with evidence)

Maps / GBP / reviews (dense call evidence — mostly practitioner + expert surveys)

Lever	Evidence	Label	URL / cite
Primary GBP category, proximity, keywords in GBP title, address in city, open-now	Whitespark LSRF 2026 “pack kings” (survey posted ~Nov 6, 2025)	Vendor / expert survey (47 experts, 187 factors)	whitespark.ca/local-search-ranking-factors

Lever	Evidence	Label	URL / cite
GBP completeness / category / reviews → pack & calls	Multiple r/localseo case posts (table above)	Practitioner-reported	reddit threads linked above
Review volume & recency	Insites dual-surfaced avg 133.4 Google reviews vs 10.7 for neither; Whitespark: review recency underrated	Primary study + expert survey	Insites benchmark ; Whitespark LSRF 2026
Dedicated service pages, best-of lists, industry domains, unstructured citation <i>quality</i> , review-site authority	Whitespark LSRF 2026 AI-factor discussion	Vendor / expert survey	same LSRF page
DIY ownership of GBP + majors	Community: DIY gets RESULT credit	Practitioner-reported	r/localseo meta

AI visibility (thinner causal evidence; stronger descriptive studies)

Finding	Evidence	Label	URL
AIO ~68% vs local packs ~39% on Whitespark local-business query set (540 queries; May 12, 2025)	Whitespark / Miriam Ellis prevalence study	Primary study (vendor-affiliated)	whitespark.ca case study
Maps mention 66% vs AI surfaces 32–38%; ChatGPT ∩ Google AIs ~19–20%; persistence ~50%; top citations GBP 28.6%, Yelp 9.5%, Facebook 2.2%	BrightLocal Local AI Visibility Study, Sep 16, 2026 (~200k prompts)	Primary study (vendor)	brightlocal.com/research/local-ai-visibility-study
Consumer AI local recs 6% → 45% YoY; 23% used AI in last local search; of AI users ~18% contact direct, ~75% check Google/Maps	BrightLocal LCRS 2026 / related AI-trust cuts	Primary study (survey)	LCRS ; LCRS AI trust
ChatGPT recommends 1.2% of brand locations vs 35.9% in 3-Pack (~30× selective); ~45% retail overlap traditional vs AI	SOCi LVI 2026 (~350k locations / 2,751 brands)	Primary study (vendor)	soci.ai news ; LVI PDF
GBP detail match ChatGPT ~55.58% / Perplexity ~48.05%; never recommended unbranded 40.88% / 68.79%; “corroboration, not optimisation”; schema/lms.txt barely correlate	Insites 10k US locals (Jul 2026)	Primary study (vendor platform)	Insites benchmark ; schema piece

What “works” for North Star Presence + Recommendability (synthesis, not a causal claim):

- **GBP excellence remains mandatory** — proof hub, Maps call volume, and the strongest public corroboration signal assistants echo.
- **Consistent, high-quality presence on majors + umbrellas** supports corroboration (Insites framing) more than vanity citation spam.
- **Review velocity and volume** correlate with both pack and dual-AI surfacing; still confound-heavy for AI alone.
- **Measuring AI separately from Maps** is itself a “what works” practice (BrightLocal Maps 66% vs AI 32–38%; SOCi selectivity).

What doesn't / waste

Anti-pattern	Why it fails / is waste	Label
Recurring listing fees for ≤~10 locations	Whitespark commentary: prefer one-time / DIY at small scale	Vendor / practitioner
Mass low-DA citation blasts	Expert consensus: noise; citations-only stalls at ~top 8–15	Expert survey + practitioner
Selling citation-cleanup-only as pack/AI ROI	No clean published cleanup-only → +X% pack/calls study (Whitespark: no clean citation-cleanup-only ROI study; BrightLocal: no published aggregator-correction → +X% pack/calls study)	Gap — do not sell
Yext-like ongoing pipe as the product	"Data hostage" / listings vanish when stop paying; Synup cancel-fee folklore (~\$1,980); Uberall enterprise-only	Practitioner-reported commercial risk
Assuming Uberall breadth / older directory studies = cleanup ROI	Older breadth studies ≠ correction ROI	Vendor historical — not cleanup ROI
Treating Localeze Completeness Score as an AI audit	Completeness = hub fill-in (Primary / Discovery / Connect / Hours), not web AI Presence/Recommendability	Product fact (Lane A)
Schema / lms.txt as the AI lever	Insites: barely correlate with recommendation	Primary study
Citations-only strategy for top 3	Practitioner: top 8–15 ceiling without GBP/reviews/on-page	Practitioner-reported
ListingsAPI as proven win path	Community: no win case study found	Practitioner-reported / UNVERIFIED absence
Equating OpenAI ↔ Foursquare partnership with ranking lift	Partnership / Places adjacency ≠ proven ranking lever	Architecture caveat
Foursquare "60–70% of ChatGPT local"	Often phrased as "reports suggest"	UNVERIFIED — do not treat as fact

BrightLocal framing remains useful commercially: **Google first, LLMs second** — not because AI doesn't matter (LCRS 6% → 45%), but because Maps still mentions tracked businesses more often and most AI users still verify on Google/Maps.

AI visibility vs classic local SEO framing

Dimension	Classic local SEO (Maps / pack)	AI visibility (assistants / AIO)
Unit of success	Rank in 3-Pack / Maps; calls from GBP	Named in answer; facts correct; re-prompt persistence
Selectivity	3-Pack ~35.9% brand appearance (SOCi)	ChatGPT ~1.2% recommended (SOCi) — ~30× tighter

Dimension	Classic local SEO (Maps / pack)	AI visibility (assistants / AIO)
Overlap	Pack ranking helps but does not guarantee AI mention	BrightLocal: Maps 66% vs AI 32–38%; intersection ChatGPT ∩ Google AIs ~19–20%
Stability	Rankings move; calls are measurable	Persistence ~50% on re-prompt (BrightLocal)
Top “citations” / sources	GBP, site, reviews, citations	GBP still top among directories (~28.6%), but business sites dominate unique domains; Yelp/Facebook trail
Expert factor mix (Whitespark LSRF 2026)	Pack kings: primary category, proximity, GBP title keywords, in-city address, open-now	AI lean: best-of lists, service pages, industry domains, unstructured citation <i>quality</i> , review-site authority
Consumer behavior	Call / direction intent	LCRS: AI recs mainstream (45%); many still verify on Google/Maps
Accuracy failure mode	Wrong hours on GBP hurt conversion	Assistants misstate NAP ~half the time even when “aware” (Insites)
Product scoreboard	Rank + calls	Presence + Recommendability (this proposal's North Star)

Framing rule for GEOLocal: classic local SEO is necessary infrastructure and the densest call evidence; AI visibility is a **separate, more selective** surface that needs its own audit (mentioned vs recommended vs **misstated**). Do not collapse them into one vanity “AI SEO” score.

Gaps and caveats

1. **Causal AI ROI from cleanup is unpublished.** No BrightLocal / Whitespark / SOCi paper cleanly shows “aggregator correction alone → +X% AI mentions or pack.” Do not invent one.
2. **r/localseo numbers are observational.** Threads like 1slake5 (73% invisible...), 1r23zji (completeness → calls), etc. are **practitioner-reported**; n is small; confounders (season, category change, ads) are real. Community already flags reclassification risk on completeness wins.
3. **Vendor studies have incentives.** BrightLocal, Whitespark, SOCi, Insites sell adjacent products. Still useful as **primary study** descriptive baselines — cite methodology, don’t treat as gospel.
4. **Foursquare 60–70% of ChatGPT local = UNVERIFIED** when phrased as “reports suggest.” OpenAI partnership ≠ ranking lever. Managed Users timing remains an open question in the proposal.
5. **Localeze Lane A mechanics:** ~\$99/year per location paywall; **no free suggest-edit**; Completeness Score = hub sections (Primary / Discovery / Connect / Hours), not a web AI audit; monthly partners often **30–90 days** — set owner expectations.
6. **Uberall / Yext / Synup commercial caveats** are practitioner folklore until contract-checked; still inform “don’t build a hostage pipe.”
7. **ListingsAPI:** no community win case study located — treat as non-proof, not proof of failure.
8. **Insites “corroboration, not optimisation”** undercuts schema/llms.txt-first GEO pitches; aligns with ticketed accuracy across real claim surfaces.
9. **SOCi sample is multi-location brands** (~350k locations). SMB single-shop dynamics may differ; still the clearest public selectivity ratio (~30×).

0. **BrightLocal citation mix** (GBP 28.6% / Yelp 9.5% / Facebook 2.2%) is study-specific; website citations dominate unique domains — own site still matters.

Implications for this proposal (North Star Presence + Recommendability; Lane A/B)

Architecture already in this file / concept SoT:

- **Two-lane:** Lane A umbrellas (Data Axle, Localeze, Foursquare) + Lane B majors (GBP, Apple Business Connect, Bing Places, Yelp).
- **North Star:** Presence + Recommendability; `BUSINESS_PLAN.md` intent = discover + recommend by AI.

Build toward:

1. **Accuracy-aware AI audit** — fixed buyer prompts; score Presence (found on claim surfaces / stomped copies) and Recommendability (named when it matters; facts match claimed truth). Prefer mentioned vs recommended vs **misstated** over vanity mention counts.
2. **One-click tickets for Lane A and Lane B** — field / wrong / right / GBP-or-claimed-truth as proof. Umbrella-only leaves Core majors wrong; majors-only leaves Layer-1 feeds stomping the claim.
3. **GBP excellence still required** — densest call evidence; strongest corroboration signal; proof hub for tickets. Do not market AI audit as a GBP substitute.
4. **Don't sell fake cleanup ROI** — no published aggregator-correction → +X% pack/calls or AI-mention study. Sell measurable re-prompt improvement and accurate tickets, not guaranteed pack jumps.
5. **Measure AI separately from Maps** — BrightLocal / SOCi / Insites all show divergence. Product dashboards must not blend pack rank into an “AI score.”
6. **DIY result credit ⇒ product posture** — make tickets and ownership easy; avoid Yext-like hostage pipes where Presence evaporates when the subscription stops. Paid pipes remain relevant for scale (~30+ / 100+ locations per practitioner consensus), as optional scale lanes — not the identity of the product.
7. **Localeze / Foursquare honesty** — charge/time expectations (Localeze paywall, 30–90 day partners); Foursquare Placemaker suggest-edit is real; OpenAI adjacency is not a ranking claim; Managed Users later.
8. **Evidence hygiene in GTM** — label practitioner vs primary study; flag UNVERIFIED (e.g. Foursquare 60–70%); keep this brief as the evidence appendix so the commercial ladder stays North-Star-tight.

Success check (unchanged intent): re-prompt the same asks; Presence and Recommendability improve (found, recommended, facts correct) — not “Localeze score went up,” not “we submitted 400 citations.”