

CLIENT RESEARCH BRIEF · WORKING DRAFT

GEOLOCAL Research Brief

Date: 2026-10-01

Branch: planning-selfserve-audit

North Star: Enable local businesses to be discovered and recommended by AI assistants — scored as Presence + Recommendability.

Relationship: Action-plan evidence layer for the alternate business proposal. Does not replace SELF_SERVE_AI_DISCOVERABILITY_CONCEPT.md . Labels: practitioner-reported · vendor · primary study · UNVERIFIED.

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RESEARCH BRIEF

The North Star

From BUSINESS_PLAN.md §1. **Verbatim:**

Intent (stable): Enable local businesses to be discovered and recommended by AI assistants.

Still wordsmithing the exact sentence. The job does not change while the phrasing does.

Scored here as: present and accurately represented wherever discovery happens; recommendable when someone asks an AI for a business like yours nearby. Industry graph = longer-term, not version one.

1. The bakery owner's pain

Picture a bakery owner who keeps losing easy customers. People show up after closing because the hours online are wrong. Others call a disconnected number and never call back. A few say they asked an assistant for a nearby bakery and got pointed somewhere else — or got her shop with the old phone number.

She sits down on a Tuesday night to fix this. She updates Google — new phone, new weekend hours — and thinks customers will find the right info everywhere. They will not. The same details still sit wrong on Yelp, Bing, Apple Maps, and dozens of directories. When someone asks ChatGPT or Gemini “where’s a good bakery near me?”, the assistant often pulls from those scattered, outdated copies. Sometimes the shop never shows up. Sometimes it shows up with last year’s number. She never sees the miss.

Fixing one listing is not the same as being findable and accurately described wherever people discover local businesses today — including when they ask AI.

There is a second pain that shows up the moment she tries to do anything serious about it: **proving the shop is hers**. Before an honest audit or before anyone will let her overwrite warehouse data, someone has to verify she is the owner or authorized stakeholder — email code, phone ping, postcard, or login to Google. That step is easy to skip in a pitch deck and miserable in real life. She is already tired. She does not have an agency. She may not control the email on the old listing. If the action plan ignores that friction, it is not an action plan she can finish alone — and the stale copies keep winning.

2. Peel the onion — the root problem

The industry still sells last year’s scoreboard: polish Google, collect reviews, push listings, score how “complete” your profile looks inside their software, track map rank. That can bring more Google calls. Almost none of those products answer: what do AI assistants actually say about my business — do they find me, recommend me, and get the facts right?

Peel further. Wrong hours and phone numbers do not mainly come from one bad Yelp page. A handful of **business-data warehouses** collect and copy your facts into directories, maps, navigation apps, and the pools assistants read from:

- [Data Axle](#) (formerly Infogroup)
- [TransUnion Digital Business Profile / Localeze](#)
- [Foursquare Places](#) (absorbed Factual in 2020)
- Plus networks agencies buy as bundles: GPS Network, YP Network, Active Sync Plus ([BrightLocal’s aggregator list](#))

Vendors profit from the mess: paid “completeness” hubs, annual trusted-stamps, syndication subscriptions that degrade when you cancel. Updating Google or Yelp alone often fails because those warehouses keep shipping the old version downstream. Acxiom’s directory products retired end of 2019; Factual is not a separate claim surface anymore — don’t build around dead names.

3. Action plan — what we build

A. Stakeholder verify, then AI-assistant audit as the scoreboard.

First, prove the person is allowed to act for the business (code to a known email, phone check, or linked Google ownership — whatever keeps impostors out without making a tired owner give up). Then ask the major assistants the questions a real customer would ask. Show them: did they find you, recommend you, get the facts right? That verified audit is why someone signs up — not a completeness score inside our software, not a map-rank tracker. Without the verify step, warehouse pushes and “fix my data” tickets are either blocked or unsafe.

B. Push verified facts into the root warehouses and the trusted sites — and track acceptance.

Warehouse / surface	What we do
Data Axle	Free claim/verify for roughly 1–10 locations; Premium / Submission API + teleresearch when scale or hard changes need it
Localeze / TransUnion	Paid manage when required (~\$99/year per location); treat Completeness as “fill the hub so partners trust the row,” not an AI audit
Foursquare	Prefer owner claim (authoritative). Use Placemaker / partner APIs with edit-status tracking when we submit at scale — community votes alone are not owner authority
Google, Apple, Bing, Yelp	Still correct the big sites people and machines trust; Google is useful proof and where many customers double-check after an AI suggestion
BrightLocal-class reseller pipes	Optional scale lane — not the identity of the product

We do not stop at “submitted a form.” We track whether the warehouse accepted the update.

C. Respect sync clocks and trusted-freshness.

When tools push through common pipes: Data Axle can move in real time; Foursquare often weekly (and one-way); Localeze often monthly. Localeze partners commonly publish in **30–90 days**. Trusted / managed stamps often last about **twelve months** — then freshness decays unless you renew or re-verify. We schedule for that, and we tell the owner the wait.

D. Re-ask AI after syncs; chase the upstream feed still poisoning copies.

Same assistant questions again. Better findability and accuracy — or we did not earn the win. If one surface is still wrong, diagnose which warehouse is still feeding it and chase that source.

E. No cancel-hostage product.

Owner keeps control of their truth. We are not a subscription that vanishes or corrupts listings when they leave (industry pattern documented when heavy syndication stops — see Whitespark’s Yext-cancel audit).

Why this is a business. Owners already pay for Maps tools and listing packs that ignore the warehouse layer. Customers ask AI for local recommendations far more than a year ago. Almost nobody both fixes the root data companies and proves it by re-checking the assistants.

Supporting research (named sources)

Data Axle. Free Local Listings for about 1–10 locations (claim, phone-verify, unlimited updates marketed free). Ten-plus: Premium / Excel / Submission API; human teleresearch on hard changes; files can take hours to ~2 weeks; failed listings can sit ~90 days. Partners include search, directories, nav, virtual assistants; marketing now cites AI-driven search. ([Data Axle Local Listings](#); [Yext × Data Axle](#) — real-time.)

Localeze / TransUnion. ~\$99/year per location (public SMB / BrightLocal writeups). 80–90+ distribution partners. Completeness Score = hub attribute fill-in for partner confidence — not a web/AI audit. Most partners process updates in **30–90 days**; Google sync can be minutes if linked. Cancel → they stop certifying owner-managed accuracy to partners. ([BrightLocal aggregators guide](#); [Duda Localeze FAQ](#); [TransUnion LP](#).) Yext → Localeze cadence: **monthly**.

Foursquare Places. Owner claim via Foursquare for Business. Community Placemaker suggest-edit needs votes before apply. Developer `suggest/edit` + status APIs (and Managed Users for higher-trust product edits). BrightLocal notes Places used by ChatGPT and powers apps like Uber / Nextdoor. Yext → Foursquare: **weekly**, one-way. ([Placemaker docs](#); [suggest-edit API](#); [BrightLocal](#).)

BrightLocal. Reseller into Data Axle, Localeze/Neustar, Foursquare, GPS Network, YP Network, Active Sync Plus (~15 credits per aggregator submission; Active Sync Plus higher). Campaigns often finish in ~7 business days; marketing promise that most go live/updated within ~38 days or free extras. Aggregator “trusted” window ~12 months. Not a root warehouse — a paid pipe.

Yext cancel pattern. [Whitespark audit](#): large share of listings wrong or gone after cancel; Yext says it leaves data and does not “steal” listings — publishers still fall back to other feeds. Product implication: don’t build a hostage pipe.

Retired. Acxiom directory/local-search products EOY 2019. Factual → Foursquare April 2020.

AI vs Maps (why the scoreboard must be AI). BrightLocal Local AI Visibility: Maps mention ~66% vs AI surfaces ~32–38%. SOCi LVI 2026: ChatGPT recommends ~1.2% of brand locations vs ~35.9% in Google’s short list of three. Insites: assistants often misstate name/address/phone even when they “know” the shop; schema/lms.txt barely correlate. No clean published study that aggregator cleanup alone → +X% AI mentions — do not invent one. Sell measurable re-ask improvement.

Practitioner snapshots (r/localseo — observational, not replicated): ~73% shops invisible to 4+ of 6 AI engines in a 50-business audit ([1slake5](#)); GBP completeness call lifts are Maps-lane attributions with confounders; “Maps opt, AI flat” anecdotes exist ([1o08abp](#)).

What we are not selling

Anti-pattern	Why
Completeness score as the product	Localeze hub fill-in ≠ what AI says
Citation blast / cleanup-only as AI ROI	No clean published cleanup → AI-mention study
Schema / lms.txt as the lever	Insites: barely correlates
Hostage syndication	Cancel degradation (Whitespark); trusted stamp expiry
Foursquare “60–70% of ChatGPT local” as fact	UNVERIFIED when phrased as “reports suggest”
Dead umbrellas (Acxiom, standalone Factual)	Retired / merged

Open questions

1. Promise: “Am I discoverable by AI?” vs “Does AI describe me correctly?”
2. Which assistants in v1?
3. How automated is accuracy vs owner compare-to-claim?

4. Localize / Data Axle: pay inside product, refer, or use pipes the owner already has — without pretending free Localize control exists?
 5. Foursquare Managed Users in v1 or later?
 6. Keep this file as GTM ladder beside the concept SoT, or merge later?
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Capture

2026-10-01 — restructured action-plan-first (pain → warehouse root → plan) after aggregator-layer research. Concept SoT unchanged.

GEOLOCAL · RESEARCH BRIEF · 2026-10-01 · planning-selfserve-audit · Confidential / working draft — action-plan-first: pain → warehouse root → fix + re-ask AI.