The 5-Minute Citation-Decay Recovery Checklist

Your business was recommended by AI. Then it stopped being cited.
Here is how local owners catch the bleed and get it back - in one sitting.

A free, no-email-requirement field guide from the team that tracks 15 local businesses in real time across ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, and Claude.

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The silent failure: you are still MENTIONED, but no longer CITED

Most owners think 'AI visibility' is binary - either ChatGPT says your name or it does not. The real failure is subtler and far more common: the assistant keeps MENTIONING your business in its answer, but stops CITING your website as its source. You stay in the answer; you lose the link. Customers read about you, but they click a competitor, a directory, or a national guide instead of you.

We track 15 local businesses in real time across five AI surfaces. Over the last three weeks we watched three of them lose citation share - not because the businesses got worse, but because of mechanical things a weekly check catches in 5 minutes. The patterns below are real, anonymized, and general: they apply to any local owner.

Three real decays we caught this month (anonymized, market-level):

- A North-Texas nail salon was the set's #1: dominant on 5 AI engines with 0 competitor citations. In one week its citations fell 100% -> 40%. It is STILL mentioned - it just lost the cite.
- A US Medicare weight-loss directory fell from 20% cited to 0% while competing sources jumped 19 -> 84 citations in the same window. It was buried faster, not recovered.
- A Greater-Boston pain-massage studio lost both mentions and citations (60% -> 40%) as national booking directories took the same-day and walk-in slots it used to hold.

The lesson: citation share decays quietly. By the time revenue dips, weeks have passed. A 5-minute weekly check is the only defense. This is that check.

The 5-Minute Checklist (do all five every Monday)

No tools to buy. No code. Five questions you can answer in a week, and they stop the bleed.

- [ ] 1. Are you still MENTIONED but NOT CITED? Ask five real customer questions into ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity (e.g. 'how much does a [service] cost in [city]?'). If your name appears in the answer but the blue source link points somewhere else - a directory, a competitor, a national guide - that is the decay. This is the single most common silent failure.
- [ ] 2. Which engine did you lose? Decay is usually engine-specific. One of ChatGPT / Gemini / Perplexity / Google AI Overviews / Claude often shifts while the others hold. A North-Texas salon we tracked reclaimed on Perplexity while losing on Gemini and Google AI Overviews in the same week. Knowing which engine moved tells you which fix to apply.
- [ ] 3. What is being cited INSTEAD of you? Read the source link. The three usual culprits: a national directory (Yext-style), a competitor's guide page, or a generic 'best near me' list. That tells you exactly which page you must out-rank.
- [ ] 4. Did your schema or llms.txt go stale? The machine-readable business info AI reads (LocalBusiness, Service, HowTo JSON-LD in the page head, plus an /llms.txt file at the site root) is what earns the citation. If it is missing, outdated, or the page 404s, the citation decays. This is the fix 80% of the time.
- [ ] 5. Is a new page actually indexed? A page you publish the same day reads as zero citations - that is NORMAL. AI engines notice new pages over 7-14 days. A same-day 'still zero' is not a failure; it is the expected lead time. Check the 7-14 day mark, not the publish mark.

Run these five questions every Monday. A flat line is good news (nothing decaying). A drop is a 5-minute fix, not a month of lost revenue.

The three root causes (and the one-line fix for each)

Cause 1 - Your cite surface is too thin

One homepage answering one question competes with a competitor that has five targeted pages. Fix: publish 3-5 pages that answer the exact customer questions you just ran, each with its own LocalBusiness/Service/HowTo schema. The more pages that answer, the more surfaces you can be cited on.

Cause 2 - Your machine-readable info is stale or missing

Missing or outdated JSON-LD, a 404 /contact page, or no /llms.txt means AI has nothing fresh to cite. Fix: put current, correct business info (name, address, phone, hours) in structured data on the page, and drop a short /llms.txt at the site root that lists your key pages for AI crawlers.

Cause 3 - A national source outranks you locally

Generic national guides win on 'best near me' prompts because they are broad. Fix: own the LOCAL, specific, 2026-dated answer - your city, your price, your current rule/program - that national content cannot match. Local specificity is the moat.

The recovery protocol (what we run on every decaying client):

1. Catch it: the 5-minute check above flags the drop the same week it starts.
2. Diagnose: which engine, which question, which competing source.
3. Publish the fix: 1-3 targeted pages + schema + /llms.txt, internal-linked from a top page.
4. Wait honestly: 7-14 days for the cite to re-form; measure then, not same-day.
5. Repeat weekly: a flat line means the moat holds; a drop means step 1 again.

Most decays we have seen recover within one weekly cycle once the page + schema are live. The ones that do not recover are the ones nobody checked - which is exactly why this checklist exists.

Want this run for you, on autopilot?

This checklist is the front page of a 10-page AI-readiness audit we run for local businesses - real measured visibility across ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, and Claude, with the exact pages and schema to publish to get cited. It is a small, one-time fee; no monthly lock-in.

GetFound Local AI

- Free AI-readiness audit checklist for your business
- Measured visibility report across 5 AI surfaces
- The exact pages + schema to get cited

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About this guide: figures are anonymized, market-level summaries of a real 15-business tracking study across five AI surfaces; no individual business is identified. Numbers are directional and illustrative, not guarantees. 'Cited' means the AI named and linked your site as a source; 'mentioned' means it referenced your business without a source link. AI answers change daily and are not a placement guarantee. Where a topic touches health, medical, legal, or financial matters, confirm with a licensed professional; this guide is not professional advice. Generated with AI assistance; reviewed for accuracy. GetFound Local AI.