

How do I get my business found by AI search?

A practical starting guide for New Zealand small businesses. Getting found by AI is a foundation, structure and authority problem. Not a content checklist.

ALL INFORMATION CURRENT AT AUGUST 2026



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AI started sending people to the front door

On 7 May 2026, ChatGPT did something quietly enormous. It began putting links to brands inside its answers instead of tucking them away in footnotes. No announcement. Most people in New Zealand did not notice.

The effect was immediate. ChatGPT referral traffic rose **157.7% in a week**.

354.7%

The rise in visits landing directly on a brand's own homepage in the week after 7 May 2026. The share of ChatGPT referrals going to a homepage jumped to about 60% and stayed there, up from 26% to 32% the week before.

Similarweb, May 2026. Global data.

For years the story was the no-click future, where AI answers everything and nobody visits a website. That story just changed. AI is now a place people discover businesses, then walk through the front door.

This guide is about what it takes for a New Zealand small business to be the one AI sends them to. It is a starting point, not the last word.

The no-click future did not arrive. Something more useful did.

Getting found by AI is a system, not a checklist

Most advice on this reads like a to-do list. Add an FAQ page. Write a few blog posts. Claim your Google listing. Tick, tick, tick.

It does not work, because getting found by AI is not a pile of separate tasks. It is three things working together. Foundation, so the AI can read you. Structure, so it can lift your answer. Authority, so it trusts you enough to repeat you.

Miss one and the other two cannot carry it. A perfect answer on a site the AI cannot reach is invisible. A reachable site with nothing worth quoting gets skipped.

I am not the only one who lands there. Forrester arrives at the same three-part answer in its own research, in different words. Make content indexable. Structure it to answer questions. Strengthen authority off your own site. (Forrester, 2026)

It also cannot be built for one tool.

87% → 53%

ChatGPT's share of visits to the AI platforms, January 2025 against May 2026. Gemini has climbed to 27% and Claude to 9% over the same period. Build for one tool and you are building for a share that is falling.

Similarweb, June 2026. Global data.

Fix one thing and you move the needle a little. Build the system and you become the answer.

1 Foundation. Can the AI even read you?

Before a word of content matters, the AI has to reach your site. The engines send crawlers to read the web, and this is where most advice gets it wrong. They run different crawlers for different jobs, and letting in the wrong one does nothing.

OAI-SearchBot	Surfaces websites in ChatGPT's search results. This is the one that matters.
GPTBot	Trains ChatGPT. Allowing it does not make you citable.
Claude-SearchBot	Crawls to improve Claude's search results. ClaudeBot trains. Claude-User fetches live.
PerplexityBot	Surfaces and links websites in Perplexity.
Googlebot	AI Overviews and AI Mode run off your ordinary search index. There is no separate crawler to allow.
Google-Extended	Only governs Gemini and Google's AI training. Nothing to do with AI Overviews.

Sources: Google Search Central guidance on AI features, 2026. OpenAI and Anthropic crawler documentation.

Answer engine bots read far more of a site per person than search crawlers do, so a slow site gets less of itself read. Three things to ask your web person for. Server-side rendering rather than heavy JavaScript. Schema markup, the labels telling an engine which pages are guides, articles or FAQs. Simple internal linking, so nothing important sits four clicks deep. (Forrester, 2026)

Cloudflare, 15 September 2026. New domains joining Cloudflare get Training and Agent bots blocked by default, on ad-displaying pages only. Search stays allowed. Existing sites are unchanged. Widely reported as a blanket block on AI crawlers. It is not. (Cloudflare, July 2026)

If the crawler cannot get in, nothing else matters. Foundation comes first.

2 Structure. Make your answer easy to lift

AI does not read your page top to bottom like a person. It lifts the part that answers the question and moves on. So the job is to make that part easy to find.

15 to 23 words

The length of a question typed into AI search, measured among business buyers. A keyword search runs three or four words. People are asking full, specific, messy questions, and thin pages written for short keywords have nothing to give them.

Forrester, 2026. Global business-to-business data.

Lead each page with a clear answer in the first two or three sentences, under a heading written as the question a real customer would ask. Question-shaped headings and a marked-up FAQ section are among the strongest things you can change on a page, particularly for Google's AI Overviews. (HubSpot, 2026)

Answer the real questions, not the comfortable ones. Put your pricing on the page, even a starting figure or a range. A clear readable price is something an engine can quote with confidence, and most of your competitors still hide theirs. Build the comparison page too, because "us and the alternatives" is the exact question people ask AI before they buy.

Break long pages into short standalone sections that make sense on their own, because those sections get lifted whole. Then group related pages around one main page on the subject. (Forrester, 2026)

Then keep it current. Pages not updated each quarter are about **three times more likely** to lose their AI citations. (AirOps, December 2025) Put a visible last-updated date on the page. And none of this replaces good SEO. Google's own guidance says getting found in AI search is still SEO. (Google, 2026)

Answer in the first two sentences. Put a price on the page. Write like a person. Keep it current.

3 Authority. Be the name worth repeating

This is the part most people miss, and the part that matters most. AI weighs what other people say about you, not just what you say about yourself.

6.5×

How much more likely a brand is to be cited through someone else's website than through its own. Forrester puts it the same way. Compared with search engines, answer engines lean more on content that is not on your site.

AirOps, December 2025. Vendor research. Corroborated by Forrester, 2026.

Reddit is worth naming, because its content is licensed to some of the AI companies, Google and OpenAI among them. That is why one good answer in the right subreddit can outweigh another page on your website. (Forrester, 2026)

Reviews carry the same weight. Overseas the advice points at G2 and Trustpilot. Here it is your Google Business Profile, NoCowboys, Trade Me feedback, and whatever directory your trade actually uses.

Here is the part that should cheer up every small business. Backlinks, the currency of old-school SEO, showed almost no correlation with AI citation across the engines HubSpot tested. One small affiliate listing page carrying a single backlink was cited 85 times. (HubSpot, 2026) Backlinks still do work in ordinary search. They are no longer the thing that decides this one.

So pick one place your customers already are. Reddit, LinkedIn or YouTube. Show up there as a real person with something useful to say, and let the engine read it. Guest articles and speaking at industry events do the same job. (Forrester, 2026)

AI trusts what others say about you. Authority is earned off your own website.

How you know it is working

You cannot improve what you cannot see, and AI search has been hard to see. That is changing.

Start with the number that matters most. How often does your business turn up in AI answers for the questions you care about? Forrester calls this answer engine results page saturation, and rates it the single strongest signal of whether the engines see you as worth citing. Rankings, impressions and click-through rates still tell you something, but they are no longer enough on their own. (Forrester, 2026)

Three things to track. How often you appear in AI answers for your handful of chosen topics. What AI says about you, not just whether it says you. And how many people search your name directly, because when that climbs, awareness is climbing with it. (Forrester, 2026)

Then the tools. On 13 May 2026 Google added an **AI Assistant** channel to Google Analytics. It picks up visits from recognised AI assistants, ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude among them, with no setup. Google has not published the full list, so look at what actually shows up in your own account. (Google, May 2026)

Two catches. It does not backfill, so your history starts the day it switched on. And clicks from Google's own AI Overviews and AI Mode are not in it, they sit under organic search.

Google Search Console added a generative AI performance report on 3 June 2026, covering AI Overviews and AI Mode. It shows impressions, not clicks. (Google, June 2026)

Neither is complete. A large share of AI visits still arrive looking like ordinary direct traffic, because the referring tool does not always pass its name. So pair the tools with the simplest check there is.

Open ChatGPT and ask what it says about your business. That is your baseline. Check it monthly.

New Zealand finally has some numbers

Until this winter there was no solid New Zealand data on any of this. Now there is, and it says something more useful than the panic headlines.

55%

of Kiwi online shoppers now use AI tools at least sometimes when they shop. It is 61% among 18 to 39 year olds.

93%

of those same New Zealanders still use a search engine or an online store to research a purchase.

IAB Australia and Pureprofile, Commerce and Discovery Report 2026. New Zealand base of 877 online shoppers.

The detail that undoes the doom stories. **76%** of those AI users take the AI summary as a quick answer and then click through to a website for the detail. And **90%** say their search engine use has held steady or gone up. (IAB, July 2026)

Among Kiwis already using AI to shop, **44%** say it has cut how much they use search engines. (PwC New Zealand, July 2026) That is a narrower group by design, and it is where things are heading. Wider still, **55%** of New Zealanders have used AI inside a search engine, and four in five have used AI at all in the past year. (InternetNZ, March 2026)

AI has not replaced search in New Zealand. It has been added on top of it. The businesses that show up in both win twice.

82% of NZ businesses now use AI, and the average Kiwi small or medium business using it earned around **\$400,000 more** in the 2025 financial year than a comparable business that did not. (2degrees and Deloitte, 2026) Almost none of them have built for AI search yet.

That gap is the opening, and it will not stay open long.

Five things to do in the next month

None of this needs a developer on retainer or a new website. It needs an afternoon a week and the discipline to do them in order.

- 1 Check the crawlers can get in.** Look at your robots file for OAI-SearchBot, Claude-SearchBot, PerplexityBot and Googlebot. Those are the four that decide whether you can be cited. If you are on Cloudflare, have a look at your bot settings while you are in there.
- 2 Ask the engines what they say about you.** Put your business name into ChatGPT, Gemini and Google AI Mode. Write down what comes back, wrong bits and all. That is your baseline.
- 3 Rewrite your five most important pages.** The customer's question as the heading. The answer in the first two sentences. A price on the page. A visible last-updated date.
- 4 Write down the 10 questions customers actually ask before they buy.** The awkward ones too. Answer each one properly, in their words rather than yours, and mark them up as an FAQ.
- 5 Pick one place off your own site.** Reddit, LinkedIn or YouTube. Whichever your customers already use. Show up there monthly as a real person, not a brand account.

Do them in this order. Number three is wasted effort if number one is broken.

85 citations, 1 backlink

One small listing page was cited 85 times across AI engines while carrying a single backlink. Domain authority is not the gate here. Being quotable is.

HubSpot, 2026. Vendor research, business-to-business software.

Small business is not the disadvantage here. Being quotable beats being big.

What to watch from here

This moves fast, and everything in this guide is current at August 2026. Five things worth knowing about the months ahead.

THE CLOUDFLARE CHANGE IS SMALLER THAN REPORTED

From 15 September 2026, new domains joining Cloudflare have Training and Agent bots blocked by default, on pages that display ads only. Search stays allowed, and existing domains are unchanged. If you already have a site and do not run ads, this does nothing to you. (Cloudflare, July 2026)

AI MODE HAS BEEN HERE A YEAR

Google AI Mode launched in New Zealand in August 2025. In the United States, Similarweb put AI Overviews on around 43% of searches in May 2026, against about 15% in January 2025. Other trackers put it far lower, nearer 18%, so treat the range rather than the headline. New Zealand has no equivalent measure at all. (Google, 2025. Similarweb, July 2026)

ADS ARE ALREADY INSIDE CHATGPT HERE

OpenAI announced the extension of its advertising test to New Zealand in March 2026 and ads went live here in April, on the Free and Go tiers. Paid placement is arriving in AI whether or not the visibility work is done underneath it. (OpenAI, 2026)

LLMS.TXT IS NOT DOING ANYTHING

Google staff have said publicly that Google does not use these files. It is not written into their published guidance, so treat it as a strong signal rather than documented policy. Adding one will not hurt. It will not help either. (Google statements, 2026)

THE FIRST REAL NATIONAL NUMBER LANDS LATER THIS YEAR

Stats NZ and MBIE surveyed around 20,000 New Zealand businesses on AI use across May and June 2026. That will replace most of the vendor surveys quoted everywhere, including some in this guide. (Stats NZ and MBIE, 2026)

When these numbers change, this guide changes with them.

What it looks like when the engine runs

When foundation, structure and authority work together, and someone keeps them current and measured, that is a system. An engine that runs your marketing rather than a tool bolted on the side. Getting found by AI is one thing the engine does. Content is one output of it, not the headline.

When I mapped the AI search discovery path for a Bay of Islands hospitality client, the work was not writing more content. It was foundation, structure and authority, built to hold together and to keep working.

I'm Lisa Byrnes. I spent decades in publishing and media, from London to Bauer Media here in New Zealand, before going all in on AI marketing systems. I build the engines. Not bolted-on tools.

This guide is deliberately a starting point. I am not here to sell myself as the country's answer engine expert. I am here because most Kiwi small businesses have not done step one yet, and step one is not hard.

The businesses that get found by AI in a year are not the ones with the cleverest tactics. They are the ones who started while everyone else was still arguing about what to call it.

**Custom-built AI systems.
Not bolted-on tools.**

Strategy. Systems. Automation. Reporting. Paid media. Content.

Let's build the system that gets you found.

Book a free Foundation clarity call. I will look at where your business stands with AI search, and what your engine would need to do. No pitch. Just a clear picture.

Bring one thing with you. Open ChatGPT before the call and ask it what it says about your business. Whatever comes back, right or wrong, is where we start.

LET'S TALK

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Where every number in this guide came from

Every figure traces to a named, dated source. Where research is New Zealand specific I have said so. Where it is not, I have said that too.

NEW ZEALAND RESEARCH

IAB Australia and Pureprofile, Commerce and Discovery Report 2026. Published 6 July 2026. New Zealand sample of 877 online shoppers aged 18 to 70, nationally representative.

PwC New Zealand, research conducted by Ipsos. Published 21 July 2026. Fieldwork 12 to 19 May 2026, 1,000 completed responses. Respondents qualified only if they had already used AI for shopping in the past year, so the base is AI-using shoppers rather than New Zealanders overall.

InternetNZ, Aotearoa Internet Insights 2025, research by Verian. Released 2 March 2026. 1,003 New Zealanders aged 18 and over.

2degrees and Deloitte Access Economics, Productivity Propelled. Reported April 2026. Commissioned research. Sample size not disclosed.

Stats NZ and MBIE, Survey of Business Operations 2026. Fieldwork May and June 2026, around 20,000 New Zealand businesses with six or more employees. Results not yet published at the time of writing.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH, USED AS CORROBORATION AND NOT AS NEW ZEALAND CLAIMS

Forrester Research, How To Stand Out In A Zero-Click World: Master AEO, Build Influence, And Earn Trust, 2026. Underlying data from Forrester's Buyers' Journey Survey 2025, bases of 16,142 and 17,649 business buyers. Global business-to-business data. Nothing New Zealand and nothing small business.

Similarweb. ChatGPT referral traffic analysis, May 2026. AI platform traffic share tracker, June 2026. The 2026 Generative AI Landscape Report, July 2026. Global data, United States weighted. Similarweb does not publish its query selection for the AI Overviews measure and other trackers report materially lower figures, so it is quoted here as a range.

AirOps, The 2026 State of AI Search. Published 2 December 2025. Vendor research. Sample size and data window not disclosed.

HubSpot, AEO masterclass, June 2026. Correlation data described in the deck as around 10,000 URLs across 10 companies and eight AI engines, in business-to-business software. Vendor research, and the underlying dataset is not published.

PLATFORM AND PROVIDER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Google. AI Assistant channel added to Google Analytics, 13 May 2026. Google has not published the full list of assistants it recognises. Generative AI performance report in Search Console, 3 June 2026. Guidance on generative AI features in Google Search, including crawler control and Ilms.txt, updated through 2026. AI Mode launched in New Zealand, 22 August 2025.

OpenAI, Anthropic and Perplexity. Published crawler documentation, for the split between training, search and user-triggered crawlers. Descriptions in this guide use each vendor's own wording.

Cloudflare. New AI traffic controls, announced 1 July 2026. From 15 September 2026 new domains onboarding to Cloudflare have bots classified as Training or Agent blocked by default on pages that display ads, while Search remains allowed. Existing domains are unchanged and any customer can opt out beforehand.

OpenAI. Advertising tests in ChatGPT announced for New Zealand March 2026, live from April 2026, on the Free and Go tiers.

A note on honesty. There is still no New Zealand measurement of AI Overviews, zero-click rates or click-through loss. Every one of those numbers circulating in local marketing content is American data with a

New Zealand headline on it. When that changes, this guide will change with it.