COSTA AI LABS · FIELD GUIDE · 2026 EDITION

CLEAR ANSWERS C
INFORMATION GAIN I
TRUST SIGNALS T
ENGINE-READABLE E
DISTRIBUTION D

Get cited.

The AI Search Playbook: 25 rules for getting your pages quoted by ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude, Gemini and Google AI Overviews.

CHATGPT · PERPLEXITY · CLAUDE · GEMINI · AI OVERVIEWS · AI MODE · COPILOT

Costa AI Labs
costaailabs.com

Includes the 86-point CITED audit checklist and a law firm quick-start

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

What's in here

01 **Search changed. Good content didn't.**
How AI engines pick what to quote, and the numbers behind it.

02 **The CITED Framework**
Five pillars that decide whether a page gets cited.

03 **The 25 rules**
Five rules per pillar, each with the why and the exact move to make.

04 **Before and after: one paragraph, rewritten**
The rules applied to a real-world practice page.

05 **Anatomy of a citation-ready page**
The block-by-block layout, top to bottom.

06 **Copy-paste technical setup**
robots.txt and schema you can ship today.

07 **Law firm quick-start**
Ten moves for attorneys, plus the ethics guardrails.

08 **Your first 30 days**
A week-by-week plan to go from invisible to cited.

09 **The 86-point CITED audit checklist**
Print it, run it on any page, score it.

How to use this guide

Read the 25 rules once. Then pick your three most valuable pages, the ones that bring in customers, and run the checklist on each. Fix the gaps, track your prompts, and repeat monthly. Don't try to do all 86 checks on every page in week one.

CHAPTER 01

Search changed. Good content didn't.

Buyers now ask ChatGPT, Perplexity and Google's AI for a recommendation before they ever click a link. The answer they get is assembled from a handful of sources. If you aren't one of them, you aren't in the conversation.

AI engines don't rank pages the way a classic results page does. They run searches, read what comes back, and stitch together an answer from the passages they trust most. Three mechanics decide who gets quoted:

1. Retrieval

The engine runs live searches, often on top of Google's and Bing's indexes. Classic SEO still feeds this step. If you can't be found, you can't be cited.

2. Query fan-out

One prompt becomes many sub-queries: cost, risks, alternatives, "best for". Pages that answer the branches get pulled in more often.

3. Chunk selection

The engine picks passages that answer cleanly on their own and come from sources it trusts. It cites the chunk, not the page.

The good news: what gets cited is what was always good content, made more explicit. Clear answers. Original information. Visible expertise. Clean technical setup. And a reputation that exists beyond your own website.

66.6%

of AI-cited pages were listicles in a study of 617,985 citations across 7 engines.

Otterly.ai

57.9%

of question-style legal searches trigger a Google AI Overview (23.6% of legal queries overall).

Ahrefs data via 5W

−86%

drop in Reddit's share of ChatGPT citations in one week of August 2026, after a change in query fan-out. Don't bet on one channel.

Promptwatch (provisional data)

7

legal directories dominate legal AI citations: Chambers, Legal 500, Super Lawyers, Best Lawyers, Martindale, Avvo and Justia.

5W Legal AI Visibility Index

CHAPTER 02

The CITED Framework

Every tactic in AI search fits under one of five pillars. Miss one and the others carry less weight.

C — Clear answers

Write so a machine can lift a clean answer straight off the page.

Rules 01–05 · 23 checklist items

I — Information gain

Generic pages don't get cited. Give the engine something it can't find anywhere else.

Rules 06–10 · 21 checklist items

T — Trust signals

Show who wrote it, why they're qualified, and where the facts came from.

Rules 11–15 · 13 checklist items

E — Engine-readable

If crawlers can't fetch it, read it and identify you, nothing else on this list matters.

Rules 16–20 · 16 checklist items

D — Distribution

AI trusts what other trusted sources say about you. Get mentioned where the engines look.

Rules 21–25 · 13 checklist items

C

PILLAR 1 OF 5

Clear answers

Write so a machine can lift a clean answer straight off the page.

01 Answer in the first 150 words.

AI engines pull the opening passage more than any other part of a page. If your answer sits under three paragraphs of backstory, the engine quotes someone else.

DO THIS Open with a two- or three-sentence answer, then a key takeaways box, then the detail.

02 Turn your headers into the questions people ask.

People prompt AI in full questions. Headers that mirror those questions map your sections directly onto the sub-queries the engine runs.

DO THIS Rewrite "Pricing" as "How much does a Chicago DUI lawyer cost?" Pull wording from People Also Ask, Reddit and sales calls.

03 Make every section a standalone island.

Engines cite chunks, not pages. A section that leans on "as mentioned above" falls apart when it is lifted out alone.

DO THIS Re-introduce the subject by name at the start of each H2. Read each section in isolation before you publish.

04 Write short, entity-rich sentences.

Subject → verb → object sentences with real names are easy to parse and easy to quote. Pronouns and vague nouns are not.

DO THIS "Illinois suspends a first-time DUI driver's license for six months" beats "There are several penalties you might face."

05 Swap adjectives for numbers.

"Affordable", "fast" and "experienced" carry no information. Numbers, dates and ranges do, and they are what engines repeat.

DO THIS "Flat fees from $2,500", "answered within 2 business hours", "1,200 cases since 2009".

PILLAR 2 OF 5

Information gain

Generic pages don't get cited. Give the engine something it can't find anywhere else.

06 **Publish one thing nobody else has.**

If your page says what ten other pages say, the engine has no reason to pick yours. Information gain is the tiebreaker.

DO THIS Add first-party data: client outcomes, pricing benchmarks, a small survey, usage stats.

07 **Prove you actually did it.**

First-hand experience is the hardest thing for generic content to fake, and the easiest for a reader to recognize.

DO THIS Real screenshots, test notes, before/after numbers and named case studies.

08 **Name your framework.**

Models repeat named ideas along with the brand that coined them. A named method turns your process into a citable concept.

DO THIS Coin it, brand it, define it in one sentence, and use the same name everywhere.

09 **Build the comparison table.**

Listicles and comparisons are the most-cited page types across AI engines. Tables are the cleanest structure for "vs" and "best" prompts.

DO THIS Real HTML table, honest columns, competitors included, a "best for" row.

10 **Answer the questions behind the question.**

Query fan-out splits one prompt into many sub-searches: cost, timeline, risks, alternatives, who it's for. Pages that cover the branches get picked more often.

DO THIS Add sections on cost, timeline, risks, who it's NOT for, alternatives and what happens next.

PILLAR 3 OF 5

Trust signals

Show who wrote it, why they're qualified, and where the facts came from.

11 Put a real expert's name on it.

Anonymous "editorial team" content is weak evidence. A named author with a verifiable profile is strong evidence.

DO THIS Byline, photo, short bio and links to LinkedIn and professional profiles. Add a "reviewed by" line on legal, medical or financial topics.

12 Show your methodology.

On ranking and comparison pages, a short "how we chose" section separates a real recommendation from an ad.

DO THIS List the criteria, the sources and the time period. Three to five bullets is enough.

13 Cite sources like a journalist.

Pages that link to statutes, studies and government data look researched. Engines treat them as safer to repeat.

DO THIS Link the primary source next to every factual claim.

14 Admit the limits.

Saying who a service is not right for reads as unbiased. Unbiased pages get quoted; sales pages get skipped.

DO THIS Add a "Who this isn't for" section and a short note on what you didn't cover.

15 Keep it fresh, for real.

Freshness is a strong citation signal, and stale facts are the fastest way to lose a citation.

DO THIS Update money pages every 30–90 days with new data, examples and screenshots. Show the date and what changed.

PILLAR 4 OF 5

E Engine-readable

If crawlers can't fetch it, read it and identify you, nothing else on this list matters.

16 Let the AI crawlers in.

Many sites block AI search bots by accident through a CDN setting or an old robots.txt rule.

DO THIS Allow OAI-SearchBot, ChatGPT-User, PerplexityBot, Claude-SearchBot, Claude-User and Googlebot. See the snippet on page 12.

17 Serve your text in HTML, not JavaScript.

Most AI crawlers don't execute JavaScript. A client-rendered page can look blank to them.

DO THIS Use server-side rendering or static generation. Test with View Source: if the text isn't there, crawlers may not see it.

18 Get indexed in Bing as well as Google.

Bing powers Copilot and has long been one of the indexes behind ChatGPT search. Many sites never submit to it.

DO THIS Verify in Bing Webmaster Tools, submit your sitemap and turn on IndexNow.

19 Mark up who you are.

Schema tells the engine's knowledge graph exactly what your business is, who wrote the page and when it changed.

DO THIS Organization or LocalBusiness (LegalService for firms), Person, Article with dateModified, and FAQPage.

20 Describe yourself the same way everywhere.

Engines match entities across the web. Inconsistent names, addresses and descriptions split you into strangers.

DO THIS Write one entity sentence and use it word for word on your site, LinkedIn, Google Business Profile and directories.

PILLAR 5 OF 5

D Distribution

AI trusts what other trusted sources say about you. Get mentioned where the engines look.

21 Get on the lists AI already cites.

Most citations point to third-party pages, and "best of" lists dominate. Being on them is often faster than outranking them.

DO THIS Run your top prompts, note every list that gets cited, and pitch the authors with a real reason to include you.

22 Own your directory profiles.

In local and professional services, AI engines lean heavily on directories. For legal queries, ranking directories often beat firm websites.

DO THIS Claim and complete every directory that appears in your prompt results. Match your entity sentence exactly.

23 Show up where AI reads.

Google's AI features cite YouTube often. ChatGPT cites LinkedIn often. Reddit's share swings, so spread out.

DO THIS One YouTube video per key topic, weekly LinkedIn posts from a named expert, helpful (not promotional) Reddit answers.

24 Earn mentions, not just links.

Unlinked brand mentions in trusted publications still teach the model who you are and what you're known for.

DO THIS Podcasts, guest columns, local press, trade publications and data-driven stories reporters can use.

25 Track your prompts every month.

AI answers change weekly. Without a prompt list you can't tell whether a change helped.

DO THIS List 20–50 buyer prompts, check them across engines monthly, and log citations and mentions separately.

CHAPTER 04

One paragraph, rewritten

Here is the opening of a typical criminal defense practice page, then the same opening rebuilt with the rules. The firm and figures are illustrative.

BEFORE

At our firm, we understand that being charged with a DUI can be one of the most stressful experiences of your life. Our experienced team of aggressive attorneys has helped countless clients navigate the complex legal system and achieve the best possible outcomes. We offer affordable rates and are here to fight for you every step of the way. Contact us today for a free consultation!

AFTER

How much does a DUI lawyer cost in Chicago? Most Chicago DUI lawyers charge a flat fee of $2,500 to $7,500 for a first offense that doesn't go to trial (illustrative range; use your own data). Trials, prior offenses and injury cases cost more. Example Law Group charges a $3,500 flat fee for first-offense DUIs in Cook County, which covers the statutory summary suspension hearing and all court dates. Attorney Jane Example, licensed in Illinois since 2011, has handled more than 900 DUI cases. *Last updated October 2026.*

What changed

- **Question header** that mirrors the prompt (Rule 02).
- **Direct answer first**, in the opening sentence (Rule 01).
- **Numbers instead of adjectives:** fee range, flat fee, case count, year licensed (Rule 05).
- **Named entities:** Chicago, Cook County, the firm, the attorney, the hearing type (Rule 04).
- **Fan-out covered:** what raises the cost, what the fee includes (Rule 10).
- **Named expert and visible date** (Rules 11 and 15).
- **Removed:** "aggressive", "countless", "best possible outcomes". Unverifiable claims get skipped by engines and can create bar advertising issues.

CHAPTER 05

Anatomy of a citation-ready page

The pages that win in both Google and AI answers tend to share the same skeleton. Build to this order, then adapt.



01 **Byline block.** Named author, credentials, reviewer and a visible last-updated date. Trust and freshness in one line.

02 **H1 with the query.** Use the words people actually search and prompt with.

03 **Direct answer.** The passage most likely to be lifted. Make it complete on its own.

04 **Key takeaways.** Three to five bullets the engine can reuse as a summary.

05 **Definition and audience.** One "X is..." sentence and who the page is for.

06 **Methodology.** How you chose, tested or ranked. Separates advice from ads.

07 **Comparison table.** The highest-value block for "best" and "vs" prompts.

08 **Question-led sections.** One sub-query per H2: cost, timeline, risks, alternatives, best for.

09 **Original media.** Real screenshots, an embedded video, first-party numbers.

10 **Proof.** Quoted reviews and specific case studies, with disclaimers where required.

11 **FAQ.** Follow-up questions from People Also Ask, Reddit and sales calls, marked up with schema.

12 **Next step.** Links to deeper pages and one call to action matched to intent.

CHAPTER 06

Copy-paste technical setup

robots.txt: let AI search crawlers in

```
# AI search and user-triggered fetchers (keep these allowed)
User-agent: OAI-SearchBot
User-agent: ChatGPT-User
User-agent: PerplexityBot
User-agent: Claude-SearchBot
User-agent: Claude-User
User-agent: Googlebot
User-agent: Bingbot
Allow: /

# Training crawlers (GPTBot, ClaudeBot, Google-Extended) are a separate
# business decision. Blocking them does not remove you from AI search.

Sitemap: https://www.example.com/sitemap.xml
```

Also check your CDN or firewall (Cloudflare and others offer one-click AI bot blocking). A robots.txt allow does nothing if the firewall blocks the request.

JSON-LD: tell the engine who you are

```
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "LegalService",
  "@id": "https://www.example.com/#firm",
  "name": "Example Law Group",
  "description": "Example Law Group is a Chicago criminal defense firm focused on DUI and
federal cases.",
  "url": "https://www.example.com/",
  "telephone": "+1-312-555-0100",
  "address": { "@type": "PostalAddress", "addressLocality": "Chicago", "addressRegion": "IL" },
  "areaServed": "Cook County, Illinois",
  "sameAs": [
    "https://www.linkedin.com/company/example-law-group",
    "https://www.avvo.com/attorneys/...",
    "https://www.justia.com/lawyers/..."
  ]
}
</script>
```

Use Organization or LocalBusiness for non-legal businesses. Add Person schema for each author and Article schema with datePublished and dateModified on every post. Validate at validator.schema.org.

CHAPTER 07

Law firm quick-start

When people ask AI for a lawyer, directories and ranking sites often outrank the firm's own website. Here are ten moves, in priority order.

01 **Run 20 real client prompts.**
"Best DUI lawyer in Naperville", "how much does a federal defense attorney cost". Note every source cited.

02 **Complete every directory that shows up.**
Avvo, Justia, Martindale-Hubbell, Super Lawyers, Best Lawyers, FindLaw, your state bar. Same name, address, phone and description everywhere.

03 **Rebuild attorney bio pages as fact sheets.**
Admissions, years licensed, case volume, courts, publications. Facts beat adjectives.

04 **Write one page per practice area per city.**
"Cook County DUI process" mirrors how people prompt. Answer first, cost section, timeline, FAQ.

05 **Publish your fee ranges.**
Cost is the first follow-up question. Firms that answer it get quoted.

06 **Add attorney review lines and dates.**
"Reviewed by [Name], licensed in Illinois since 2011. Updated October 2026."

07 **Add LegalService, Attorney and FAQPage schema.**
Almost no firm sites have it, which makes it a cheap edge.

08 **Rewrite partner LinkedIn profiles.**
Specific, claim-dense headlines and About sections. Post weekly on real legal questions.

09 **Earn Google reviews steadily.**
Recent reviews feed local AI answers. Ask at case close, every case.

10 **Answer real questions on video.**
Two-minute YouTube answers to common client questions, embedded on the matching practice page.

ETHICS GUARDRAILS

Attorney advertising rules apply to everything above. Many states restrict testimonials, past-results claims, comparative claims and words like "expert" or "specialist". Add result disclaimers, keep claims verifiable, and check your state bar's rules before publishing. This guide is marketing guidance, not legal advice.

CHAPTER 08

Your first 30 days

You don't need to fix everything. You need to fix the right three pages, then build the habit.

WEEK 1

Baseline

- Write 20–50 buyer prompts.
- Run them in ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, Google AI Mode and Claude. Log who gets cited.
- Check robots.txt, CDN bot settings and server rendering.
- Verify Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools.

WEEK 2

Fix three money pages

- Pick the three pages closest to revenue.
- Run the 86-point checklist on each.
- Add the direct answer, takeaways, question headers, cost section and FAQ.
- Add the byline, review line and updated date.

WEEK 3

Add what only you have

- Add one first-party data point per page.
- Build one comparison table or honest "best of" page.
- Ship Organization, Person, Article and FAQPage schema.
- Write your one-sentence entity statement.

WEEK 4

Get mentioned

- Claim and complete every directory from your prompt log.
- Pitch two "best of" list authors.
- Publish one YouTube video and two LinkedIn posts.
- Re-run your prompts. Compare against week 1.

Then, every month

Re-run the prompt list. Refresh any page that lost a citation. Publish one new piece of original information. Add one new third-party mention. AI answers move fast, so the habit beats any one-time fix.

CHAPTER 09

The 86-point audit checklist

Run it on one page at a time. Count the checks, divide by 86, and score the page.

90%+	70–89%	40–69%	Under 40%
Cited-ready	Citable	Emerging	Mostly invisible

C Clear answers

ANSWER-FIRST STRUCTURE 7

- [ ] Direct answer in the first 100–150 words
- [ ] H2s written as the questions people ask
- [ ] Every H2 section stands on its own
- [ ] Key takeaways box near the top
- [ ] Plain-language definition of the core topic
- [ ] A clear verdict or recommendation
- [ ] Obvious who the page is for

SENTENCE CRAFT 6

- [ ] Short sentences, one idea each
- [ ] Short paragraphs (2–4 sentences)
- [ ] Written in semantic triples
- [ ] Named entities instead of vague references
- [ ] Specific numbers, dates and ranges
- [ ] No vague or salesy superlatives
  Law: Many state bars restrict unverifiable comparative claims and words like "expert" or "specialist". Check your jurisdiction's advertising rules.

PAGE COMPONENTS 10

- [ ] Comparison table
- [ ] Bulleted and numbered lists
- [ ] FAQ section with 5–10 real questions
- [ ] Numbered steps for any process
- [ ] Pros and cons
- [ ] Cost or pricing section
- [ ] Original images or screenshots with descriptive alt text
- [ ] Embedded video
- [ ] One clear call to action matched to intent
- [ ] Descriptive internal links to related pages

I Information gain

UNIQUE ASSETS 10

- [ ] First-party data or statistics
- [ ] Original research or a survey
- [ ] Proof of first-hand experience
- [ ] Real screenshots of the product or process in use
- [ ] Case study with named specifics
  Law: Case results usually need a disclaimer that past results do not guarantee a similar outcome.
- [ ] Quotes from named, credentialed experts
- [ ] Direct quotes from customer reviews
  Law: Testimonials are restricted or require disclaimers in some states. Confirm your bar's rules before quoting clients.
- [ ] A named, proprietary framework
- [ ] A contrarian, evidence-backed position
- [ ] A free tool, calculator, template or checklist

QUERY FAN-OUT COVERAGE 11

- [ ] Adjacent basics: what it is, how it works, main types
- [ ] Cost and budget
- [ ] Timeline and effort
- [ ] Risks, limitations and common mistakes
- [ ] Who this is NOT right for
- [ ] Named alternatives
- [ ] "Best for" segments
- [ ] How to choose and what to ask before buying
- [ ] What happens after someone takes action
- [ ] Links to deeper resources
- [ ] Location-specific variants where relevant
  Law: City + practice area pages ("Cook County DUI process") mirror how people ask AI for lawyers.

T Trust signals

AUTHOR AND EVIDENCE 8

- [ ] Named author with a bio and photo
- [ ] Author page with credentials and profile links
  Law: Link the attorney's state bar profile and directory profiles (Avvo, Justia, Martindale).
- [ ] Expert reviewer line on high-stakes topics
  Law: Have a licensed attorney review legal content and say so on the page.
- [ ] Reputable sources cited and linked
- [ ] Methodology section
- [ ] Transparent limitations
- [ ] About page with concrete company facts
- [ ] Sourced social proof

FRESHNESS 5

- [ ] Visible "last updated" date
- [ ] Real updates every 30–90 days on money pages
- [ ] Current year referenced where it matters
- [ ] "What changed" note on updated pages
- [ ] Prices, features, rankings and rules kept current
  Law: Track statute changes and new case law in your practice area, and update affected pages.

E Engine-readable

TECHNICAL ACCESS 9

- [ ] AI search crawlers allowed in robots.txt
- [ ] Main content in server-rendered HTML
- [ ] Indexed in Bing (Webmaster Tools + IndexNow)
- [ ] Indexed in Google (Search Console)
- [ ] No nosnippet or tight max-snippet limits on key pages
- [ ] Fast and mobile-friendly
- [ ] XML sitemap with accurate lastmod dates
- [ ] Semantic HTML with a clean heading hierarchy
- [ ] llms.txt file (optional bonus)

SCHEMA AND ENTITY CLARITY 7

- [ ] Organization or LocalBusiness schema with sameAs links
  Law: Use LegalService or Attorney types for firms and lawyers.
- [ ] Person schema for every author
- [ ] Article schema with datePublished and dateModified
- [ ] FAQPage schema that matches the visible FAQ
- [ ] One consistent entity statement everywhere
- [ ] Consistent name, address and phone
- [ ] Complete Google Business Profile
  Law: Pick precise practice-area categories and list each practice area as a service.

D Distribution

OFF-SITE MENTIONS 8

- [ ] Listed on the directories AI cites in your niche
  Law: Avvo, Justia, Martindale-Hubbell, Super Lawyers, Best Lawyers, FindLaw and your state bar directory.
- [ ] Included in third-party "best of" lists
- [ ] Your own honest "best of" and comparison pages
- [ ] Genuine participation on Reddit and Quora
- [ ] A YouTube video for each key topic
- [ ] LinkedIn articles and posts from named experts
- [ ] PR, guest posts and podcast appearances
- [ ] Steady stream of reviews on Google and niche platforms

MEASURE AND ITERATE 5

- [ ] A list of 20–50 buyer prompts
- [ ] Monthly checks across the main engines
- [ ] Citations and mentions tracked separately
- [ ] AI referral segment in GA4
- [ ] Refresh pages that are losing citations first

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Sources

- **Otterly.ai**, "What Content Do AI Engines Cite? A Study of 617,985 Citations Across 7 Engines and 5 Industries" (2026). otterly.ai/blog/content-types-cited-by-ai-study
- **5W**, "Legal AI Visibility Index 2026", citing Ahrefs data on AI Overview trigger rates for legal queries. 5wpr.com/research/legal-ai-visibility-index-2026. Note: produced by an agency that sells GEO services.
- **Promptwatch**, "Reddit Citations Are Dropping in ChatGPT" (July–August 2026 data; the author labels the drop provisional). promptwatch.com/data/reddit-citations-are-dropping-in-chatgpt
- **Winston Digital Marketing**, "How to Get Cited by ChatGPT in 2026", citing Ahrefs Brand Radar (September 2026). winstondigitalmarketing.com
- **Contact (Rob Hoffman)**, "The AI Search Checklist" and the video "How I Create 'Simple' Blog Posts That Make Millions From ChatGPT". inboundengineer.io

Vendor studies measure different engines, prompts and time windows, and AI citation patterns change month to month. Treat every percentage here as directional. The rules in this guide are built to hold up across those changes.

COSTA AI LABS

Want to know if AI recommends you?

We test your real buyer prompts across ChatGPT, Claude and Perplexity, show you exactly who gets cited instead of you, and build the pages that change it. For small businesses and law firms.

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