

Study: ChatGPT, Perplexity & Gemini cited 104 sources in 30 answers — and can't agree on any of them

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New Study: AI Assistants Can't Agree Which UK Businesses to Recommend — ChatGPT, Perplexity and Gemini Cited 104 Different Sources Across Just 30 Answers

Logged study finds each AI assistant picks recommendations a different way — meaning UK businesses can be highly visible on one assistant and invisible on another

MANCHESTER, UNITED KINGDOM — 21 August 2026 — When UK buyers ask AI assistants who to hire, the assistants can't agree on the answer. A newly published study that logged first answers from ChatGPT, Perplexity and Gemini to ten fixed buyer questions found the three assistants cited 104 different web sources across just 30 answers — with only eleven sources cited more than once, and only three businesses recommended by all three assistants.

The study, conducted on 19–20 August 2026 by Manchester-based AI visibility agency The Happy Cat, asked each assistant identical questions a real buyer might pose — including "best AI visibility agency UK" and "AI SEO agency Manchester" — recording the first answer verbatim, with every response screenshotted and published.

Its central finding: each AI assistant chooses recommendations in a fundamentally different way.

- **ChatGPT** recommended businesses from their own websites — every source it cited carried a tracking tag, `utm_source=chatgpt.com`, ChatGPT literally labelling its own referral traffic. Businesses whose sites block AI crawlers, or never state plainly what they do, cannot be recommended this way.
- **Perplexity** almost never cited a business's own site, drawing instead on third-party comparison articles, industry roundups — and in one case, a press release.
- **Gemini** quoted passages from detailed published articles, rewarding businesses that have written something substantive enough to quote.

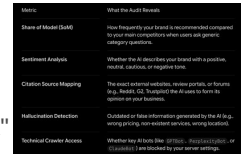
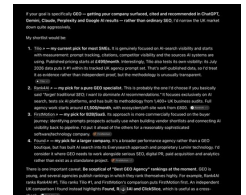
"The practical upshot is that AI visibility is currently a lottery with three different sets of rules," said Alex Golombeck, founder of The Happy Cat. "A business can be ChatGPT's top recommendation and completely absent from Perplexity. And because the citation landscape is this fragmented — 104 sources, most cited exactly once — there's no entrenched winner. Small, specific businesses are winning answers against much larger competitors simply by being readable and quotable."

In an unusual step, the agency also published its own result: The Happy Cat appeared in none of the 30 answers, a baseline it recorded days after its own website first became readable to AI crawlers. It has committed to re-running the identical 30 queries on 16 September and 14 October 2026 and publishing the results regardless of outcome.

"Every agency in this industry claims it can get businesses recommended by AI. Almost none publish a measured starting point — including for themselves," Golombeck said. "We published our zero because a dated, logged baseline is the only honest way to prove anything works. Any business can replicate our method for free; it's all published."

The full study, including methodology and a data-based comparison of UK AI visibility agencies ranked solely by logged recommendation counts, is available at <https://thehappycat.com/insights/we-scored-zero-ai-visibility-baseline> and <https://thehappycat.com/insights/uk-ai-visibility-agencies-august-2026>.

About The Happy Cat



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The Happy Cat is an AI visibility (GEO) agency helping UK businesses get found and recommended by AI assistants such as ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity and Gemini. Founded by Alex Golombeck and based in Manchester, the agency documents its methodology publicly, applying the same measured, baseline-first process to its own visibility as it does to client work. The Happy Cat also designs and builds bespoke AI tools and interactive digital experiences for UK businesses.

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