

# The 2026 Seattle Agency AI Citation Index

We ran **250 buyer-intent queries** across ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, and Perplexity to measure which Seattle and Pacific Northwest digital agencies AI assistants actually recommend — and which on-site signals correlate with being cited.

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## The short version

1. Each engine rewards a different mix of signals. A Clutch profile is a near-prerequisite for Claude and Gemini; Reddit grounding is what moves ChatGPT and Perplexity.
2. The top 5 Seattle agencies by composite citation rate are not the largest by headcount or media spend — they are the ones with the cleanest combination of directory presence, entity page, FAQ schema, and recent Reddit mentions.
3. Structural fixes ship faster than reputational ones. A site can move from 0% to ~30% citation rate in 60 days with technical AEO alone; getting past 50% requires off-site reputation work.
4. Claude is the most concentrated engine — 72% of mentions go to the top 3 brands. If you are not in Clutch or DesignRush, Claude is structurally unlikely to name you regardless of on-site optimization.

## Per-engine results

250 identical queries against each engine, May 12 – June 6, 2026. Brands named per query is the mean across all 250 prompts.

Engine	Queries	Brands (avg)	Concentration	Top cited sources
ChatGPT (search)	250	6.4	Long tail — top 5 win ~38%	Clutch, .com sites, Reddit, Medium
Gemini	250	4.1	Concentrated — top 5 win ~61%	Google Business Profile, DesignRush, Clutch
Claude (web_search)	250	2.3	Highly concentrated — top 3 win ~72%	Clutch, DesignRush, Manifest, GoodFirms
Perplexity	250	7.8	Broadest — long tail of 25+	Clutch, DesignRush, .com sites, Reddit

# What correlates with being cited

For each agency we recorded the presence or absence of seven structural signals, then regressed citation rate against each. Lift is in percentage points (pp) vs the no-signal baseline.

Signal	Citation-rate lift	Notes
Verified Clutch profile with $\geq 10$ reviews	+18 to +42 pp	Largest single lift. Most pronounced on Claude and Gemini.
Dedicated entity page in third-person prose with Organization schema	+9 to +21 pp	Strongest on Claude. No measurable effect on Perplexity until paired with Clutch.
FAQ schema on service pages + answer-shaped H2s	+7 to +15 pp	ChatGPT and Perplexity reward this most; quotes the answer verbatim.
llms.txt + llms-full.txt published at site root	+3 to +8 pp	Small but consistent. Acts as a tie-breaker between similar agencies.
$\geq 3$ Reddit threads in the last 12 months naming the agency	+11 to +24 pp	ChatGPT and Perplexity only. Claude weights Reddit less.
Real case studies with named clients (not anonymous logos)	+6 to +14 pp	Across all engines. Named-client pages get scraped into snippets.
Page rendered with SSR / SSG (not client-side React)	Required	Pages behind client-side hydration are invisible to Claude and Gemini crawlers.

## Methodology

**Universe.** 25 Seattle and Pacific Northwest digital agencies that ranked on page one or two of Google for at least one of *Seattle web design agency*, *Seattle WordPress development*, *Seattle Drupal agency*, or appeared in Clutch's Seattle top 10 web design listings as of May 1, 2026.

**Queries.** 250 prompts in 10 categories — web design, WordPress, Drupal, Shopify, ecommerce, rebranding, AEO/AI search, digital marketing, higher-ed CMS, and government / public-sector. Each category contained 25 paraphrased variants of the same buyer-intent question.

**Engines.** ChatGPT with web search (gpt-4o), Gemini 2.5 Pro with grounding, Claude Sonnet with the web\_search\_20250305 tool, and Perplexity Sonar. Each query was run twice on separate days, in fresh sessions, with no system prompt and no memory.

**Scoring.** A “citation” was counted when an agency name appeared in the answer body or the source list. Generic mentions inside long lists were excluded; the brand had to be recommended, compared, or cited as a source.

**Lift estimation.** Citation rate computed for agencies with vs without each signal, with bootstrapped 95% CI (1,000 resamples). Lift ranges in the table are inner 95% CI bounds, not point estimates.

**Limitations.** AI engines are stochastic; results drift week to week. Sample size (n=25 agencies) means signal-level lift estimates are directional, not precise. Engines tested in their consumer configurations only.

**Replicability.** The 250-prompt set, per-engine response logs, and the scoring rubric are available on request to qualified researchers and clients.