

AI search vs Google search for a local business

The same customer question, two very different outputs, and what that shift changes

Google search

YOU SORT THE LIST

"water heater replacement memphis"

Map pack · 3 listings + reviews

Most local clicks concentrate up here

1. Competitor A — Water Heater Repair

Big slice of the remaining clicks

2. Directory listing page

Aggregator holding a top spot

5. Your business

Fewer clicks, but still real traffic

...plus page 2, which almost nobody visits

The searcher does the comparing. Six tabs, a scan of reviews, a decision. A mid-list position still earns visits, quotes, and jobs.

AI search

THE MODEL SORTS

"who should I call to replace a water heater in Memphis?"

1 Competitor A

Strong recent reviews mentioning same-day water heater work

2 Competitor B

Consistent listings, clear pricing on its site

3 Competitor C

Detailed service pages the model can quote

Everyone else: not named. There is no position 4, no page 2.

The model does the comparing. It reads profiles, listings, reviews, and site copy, then hands back a short verdict with reasons attached.

WHAT CHANGES FOR A LOCAL BUSINESS

Zero-click answers

"What does it cost" questions get answered in the chat window. The visit never happens, but the source can still get named.

Fewer, warmer visitors

Whoever still clicks through already saw you recommended. Traffic drops; conversion rate per visitor climbs.

Winner-take-most

The 2–3 named businesses split nearly all the demand, and each job feeds the signals that keep them named.

Same inputs, less forgiveness

Profiles, listings, reviews, and site content still decide the outcome. Inconsistencies now cost you the whole mention.