

TOP-20 AI SEO / GEO / AEO AGENCIES – DATA-GROUNDED EVALUATION

Who Is Actually Winning AI Search?

A Data-Grounded Evaluation of the Top Digital Marketing Agencies Offering GEO, AI SEO, AEO Services

A data-driven, source-transparent comparison built on measured AI-assistant visibility, third-party review reputation, verifiable agency experience and manipulation-risk exposure.

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YEAR-TO-DATE DATA · SINGLE MEASUREMENT SNAPSHOT

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Abstract

Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), Answer Engine Optimization (AEO), and "AI SEO" have emerged over roughly the last two years as digital-marketing agencies race to make their clients visible inside AI-assistant answers from ChatGPT, Google's AI Overviews, Perplexity, Gemini, and Copilot. Because the discipline is so new, no agency yet has a long, independently audited GEO track record, and most publicly promoted "GEO results" are self-measured and unverifiable. This paper takes a deliberately narrow, falsifiable approach: rather than trusting marketing claims, it evaluates providers on data that can be checked.

We assessed 33 agencies (of which 22 have SEO/GEO as a stated core focus and are therefore rank-eligible) along four evidence axes: (1) measured AI-assistant visibility from Rankscale, the AI-search monitoring platform, used here on the principle that "an agency will do for itself what it can do for its clients"; (2) third-party review reputation aggregated across Clutch, Google, and Trustpilot with a confidence-adjusted rating; (3) verifiable experience, proxied by the number of case studies published in a firm's own sitemap and its years in business; and (4) exposure to a specific manipulation tactic – self-serving "Best X agencies" listicles in which a firm ranks itself – treated as a downside risk because it exploits a retrieval weakness that AI platforms have strong incentives to close.

Because the discipline is so young and genuine third-party evidence is thin, the study makes no claim about which tactics currently move AI answers; it evaluates the agencies themselves. Under a transparent composite model – 55% measured AI visibility, 25% third-party review reputation, 20% verifiable experience, minus a penalty of up to 15 points for exposure to self-serving listicles – the top five rank-eligible providers are Coalition Technologies (90.8), WebFX (81.3), SmartSites (73.3), OuterBox (68.9), and Thrive Agency (60.2). The four axes are deliberately kept distinct: visibility is one signal of capability, and the absence of a fragile, backfire-prone tactic is a separate quality signal, assessed independently of how much visibility it may currently produce. The ranking is robust to that penalty – removing it entirely leaves the order in 97% rank agreement with the penalized version (Spearman $\rho \approx 0.97$) and does not change the leaders. The model inputs, definitions, and weights are documented in full so the methodology can be understood and independently scrutinized.

At a glance

Scope: 22 rank-eligible AI SEO/GEO/AEO agencies (top 20 reported), drawn from a 33-brand competitive set.

Primary data: Rankscale AI-visibility export, year-to-date 2026, captured 11 July 2026 – a single snapshot.

Headline framing: agencies are judged on verifiable evidence – measured visibility, independent reviews, documented work – with reliance on self-serving listicles treated as a separate, forward-looking risk.

Reproducibility: every input, weight, and definition is stated in full; all inputs are listed in the appendix.

1. Introduction

1.1 The shift from ten blue links to one synthesized answer

For twenty-five years, search-engine optimization meant competing for position in a ranked list of links. AI assistants change the objective. When a user asks ChatGPT or Google's AI mode "who are the best SEO agencies?", the system returns a single synthesized answer¹, and brands compete to be named and cited inside that answer rather than to occupy a blue link beneath it. Industry practitioners have estimated that a large share of searches now end without a click, and recent studies of AI-generated search summaries provide additional evidence that users increasingly receive answers directly within search results rather than navigating to traditional links.² The set of practices aimed at winning that inclusion has acquired several overlapping names – Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), Answer Engine Optimization (AEO), and the looser umbrella-term, "AI SEO."

This paper treats those three terms as interchangeable, referring to one practice area. Agencies may draw distinctions among them in relation to specific functions, methods, or best practices, but those distinctions are immaterial to the question a buyer actually faces: among the agencies now selling this service, which ones have evidence behind their claims? That question is unexpectedly hard to answer, for one structural reason developed next.

1.2 Why GEO is uniquely hard to evaluate

GEO is roughly two years old as a named service. That youth has three consequences for evaluation. First, no provider has a long, independently audited GEO track record; anyone claiming a decade of GEO experience is describing SEO experience relabeled. Second, most published GEO "case studies" are self-hosted and self-measured: the agency defines the metric, measures it, and reports the result, with no neutral referee. Third, the review ecosystem that exists for general marketing services (Clutch, G2, Google) has not yet accumulated GEO-specific reviews, so buyers cannot lean on a body of third-party feedback the way they can for, say, PPC management.

The practical response adopted here is to refuse to grade providers on unverifiable GEO performance claims, and instead to measure the few things that can be checked independently. Chief among these is a provider's own visibility inside AI assistants – a quantity a neutral platform can measure directly, and one that carries a useful logical property discussed next.

1.3 "An agency will do for itself what it can do for its clients"

A GEO agency's own presence in AI answers is a useful proxy for demonstrated AI-search capability. While an agency's ability to rank itself cannot perfectly predict outcomes for every client, it provides a directly observable example of whether the firm can earn visibility, citations, and favorable representation from the same AI systems it helps clients navigate. Agencies differ in client mix, budgets, industries, and strategic priorities, so self-visibility should not be interpreted as a guarantee of client performance. However, because every provider evaluated here operates in the same AI-search environment and competes for similar buyer-intent queries, measured self-visibility is a meaningful signal of practical execution ability. Public case studies and testimonials, by contrast, are curated, self-measured, and difficult to compare consistently across firms. Measured self-visibility is therefore used in this study as the single largest input, not because it captures the entirety of GEO capability, but because it is the most manipulation-resistant signal currently available and it is comparable across every firm on identical terms.

This proxy has an important limitation, stated plainly so it is not overlooked: a boutique agency may deliberately invest little in its own marketing while producing excellent client work, and would score low on self-visibility despite real competence. The model mitigates this by combining self-visibility with review reputation and verifiable experience, but the caveat stands and is revisited in the limitations section.

1.4 Self-serving listicles as a manipulation risk, not a capability

A specific tactic has proliferated as agencies chase AI visibility: publishing “Best X agencies” or “Top # SEO companies” pages on their own domains that conveniently rank the publishing agency first. Anyone who searches a phrase like “best GEO agencies” in ChatGPT or Google’s AI Overviews can see the consequence – self-published rankings of this kind routinely appear among the cited sources, so the tactic can, at least for now, influence what AI systems surface. This study counts these pages, but it treats them as a downside risk rather than a credential, and it does so independently of whether they currently help: the tactic depends on a retrieval vulnerability that AI developers are strongly incentivized to remove. The history of web search is a history of exactly such corrections³ – link schemes, keyword stuffing, and scaled low-quality content each produced temporary gains before ranking systems learned to discount or penalize them.⁴ Once self-ranking pages are widespread they also form an obvious pool of circular, low-independence evidence: companies citing themselves as proof that they are the best. A provider that leans heavily on this tactic therefore carries a latent fragility – its visibility is built partly on a mechanism likely to be corrected – and that fragility is a legitimate mark against it regardless of the tactic’s present-day payoff.

1.5 Contributions and structure

This paper makes four contributions:

1. A transparent, reproducible composite ranking of the top 20 rank-eligible AI SEO/GEO/AEO agencies, with every weight exposed and adjustable.
2. A separation of capability from risk – the four evidence axes are scored independently, so that a firm’s measured visibility is never conflated with its reliance (or non-reliance) on tactics that may not last.
3. A separation of verifiable fact from self-reported claim, so that no provider is credited for marketing it cannot substantiate.
4. A full audit trail: the raw inputs, the metric definitions, and the sensitivity of the ranking to modeling choices.

Section 2 details data sources and methodology. Section 3 presents the ranking and the anatomy of the scores. Section 4 profiles the leading providers. Section 5 gives sensitivity and robustness checks. Section 6 states limitations. Section 7 concludes. Appendices contain the complete data tables and metric glossary.

Notes

1. Google. “Find information in faster & easier ways with AI Overviews in Google Search.” <https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/14901683>
2. Pew Research Center. “Google users are less likely to click on links when an AI summary appears in the results.” 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/07/22/google-users-are-less-likely-to-click-on-links-when-an-ai-summary-appears-in-the-results/>
3. Search Engine Journal. A Complete Guide to the Google Panda Update: 2011-21 <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/google-algorithm-history/panda-update/>
4. Google. Spam policies for Google web search <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/essentials/spam-policies>

2. Data and Methodology

Below you will find the tools and methodologies used to audit, evaluate, and analyze the GEO performance of the agencies mentioned in the introduction. To ensure the results can be independently evaluated, a provider is credited only for evidence a third party could independently verify.

2.1 The competitive set and the eligibility threshold

The study begins from a competitive set of 33 agencies that appear in AI answers about SEO, GEO, and related services. These brands were not manually selected; they were identified through Rankscale's competitor-discovery process, which surfaces brands appearing as mentions or cited sources in the AI answers generated from its monitored prompt panel. Rankscale is a platform built specifically for AI-search measurement, tracking brand mentions and citations across the major AI engines. Because each data point is backed by a stored answer, the measurements are observed and traceable rather than self-reported by the ranked firms. The initial discovery pool includes software tools, directories, and other non-agency entities that co-occur in the same answer space; this study narrowed that pool to the agency competitors relevant to the AI SEO/GEO/AEO category. Inclusion in the resulting set indicates observed presence in these AI answers, not that a brand is a strong performer.

An eligibility threshold is then applied to make the ranking comparable: only agencies for which SEO, GEO, or AEO is a stated core service offering are ranked. Agencies whose primary focus lies elsewhere, such as paid media, social media, or web development, are retained for context but marked "not eligible" (N/E) and never receive a rank. Of the 33 agencies in this set, 22 were deemed eligible to participate in the study, and 11 are marked N/E. All 33 agencies, including the N/E entries, are listed in Appendix A for transparency. The ranking reports on the top 20 of the 22 eligible providers.

Why keep non-eligible brands in the data?

The broader discovery pool contained software vendors and other non-agency entities, but the final dataset retains only agency competitors. Non-eligible agencies are kept for context while excluded from the ranking so that the competitive landscape remains transparent: these firms appear in the same AI-answer space as the eligible providers, but their primary service focus does not meet the study's ranking criteria. Appendix A reports all 33 agencies, including N/E entries, for transparency. Restricting the rank itself to firms with SEO, GEO, or AEO as a stated core focus keeps the comparison like-for-like. The two eligible providers that fall just outside the top 20 (ranked 21st and 22nd) are shown explicitly in Section 3. The highest-scoring non-eligible agencies are also profiled in Section 4 using the same scoring framework as ranked providers, allowing readers to evaluate how the eligibility criteria affect the final ranking.

2.1.1 Additional screening of low-signal candidates

The initial Rankscale discovery export contained a broader set of brands than the final competitive cohort. Some agencies appearing in the export were not carried forward for deeper evaluation because their measured AI-visibility footprint was too limited to support reliable comparison across the additional manually collected axes (reviews, case studies, service validation, and risk factors). This was not treated as evidence of poor performance; rather, it reflected a data-availability threshold required to keep the final evaluation comparable. Agencies considered but excluded at this stage due to insufficient Rankscale signal included: Common Thread Collective, Onely, SeoProfy, Brighter Click, Clay, Flowium, Funnel Boost Media, Hudson Creative, We Make Websites, Wpromote, HawkSEM, Black Propeller, Darkroom, Logical Position, Mira Commerce, NinjaPromo, Hawke Media, Optimum7, Structured Agency, DigitlHaus Agency, JumpFly, Oddit, SPLIT Development, Baunfire, Charle, Embarque, Firestarter SEO, GoMage, IWD Agency, Netalico, Ogilvy, Thrivelia, Whitehat SEO, SimpleTiger, and Go Fish Digital.

These exclusions reflect the practical constraints of building a manually validated ranking, not a judgment that these agencies lack capability or relevance. A firm can have strong client performance while maintaining limited public AI-search visibility, and this limitation is addressed elsewhere in the paper.

2.2 Primary source: Rankscale AI-visibility measurement

The largest single input is a measurement of how often, how prominently, and how favorably each brand appears inside AI-assistant answers. This measurement is supplied by Rankscale — an AI-search monitoring platform, founded in 2024, and the author of this study. The platform operates by running a structured panel of natural-language prompts repeatedly across multiple AI engines and recording, for each brand, whether it is mentioned, whether its URLs are cited as sources, where it appears in the answer, and in what tone. Because each data point corresponds to a specific stored answer, and the same panel and rules are applied uniformly to every brand, the measurement is observable and reproducible rather than a product of platform discretion.

The metrics used in this study, with Rankscale’s own definitions, are:

Rankscale metric	Definition (as used in this study)
Visibility Score (%)	The aggregate 0–100 headline metric for a prompt group: a brand’s overall share of AI-answer presence, combining detection, position, and citation. Used here as the flagship visibility measure.
Detection Rate (%)	Share of prompt runs in which the brand appears at all (a mention or a citation). A measure of how reliably a brand shows up.
Position (Avg. Rank)	Where the brand appears in the answer, averaged: #1–3 strong, #4–6 mid, #7+ weak. Lower is better.
Top-3 Rate (%)	Share of runs in which the brand lands in the top three positions of the answer – the prominent, most-read slots.
Mentions	Count of runs where the brand name appears in the answer text (awareness signal).
Citations	Count of runs where the brand’s URL is linked as a source inside the answer (trust signal).
Sentiment (%)	How favorably AI describes the brand. Per Rankscale, ≥65% positive is healthy; 55–65% neutral; below 55% is a reputation risk.

Table 1. Rankscale metric definitions. Source: Rankscale onboarding and glossary documentation provided with the dataset.

Two properties of this source matter for interpretation. First, the metrics are defined and measured by the platform, not by the agencies themselves, on identical terms for every brand. Second, the specific export used here was drawn from the Rankscale account of one agency in the set, because that is the account to which the analyst had access. This raises a reasonable question of bias, addressed directly next.

2.2.1 Provenance of the export and the neutrality safeguard

The Rankscale data is year-to-date for 2026, captured on 11 July 2026 as a single snapshot from a Rankscale dashboard export (Exhibit 1). Crucially, the metric values are properties of each brand’s presence in AI answers, not properties of the account used to access the data: Rankscale measures WebFX’s or Coalition Technologies’ visibility the same way regardless of the account performing the query. To assess whether the dataset showed signs of account-specific bias, the raw values were cross-checked for internal consistency, and – as Section 3 shows – no single provider dominates every metric. The analysis applies the same methodology and weighting rules to every provider, without manual adjustments favoring any firm. Nonetheless, the use of a single data export is listed among the study’s limitations (Section 6).

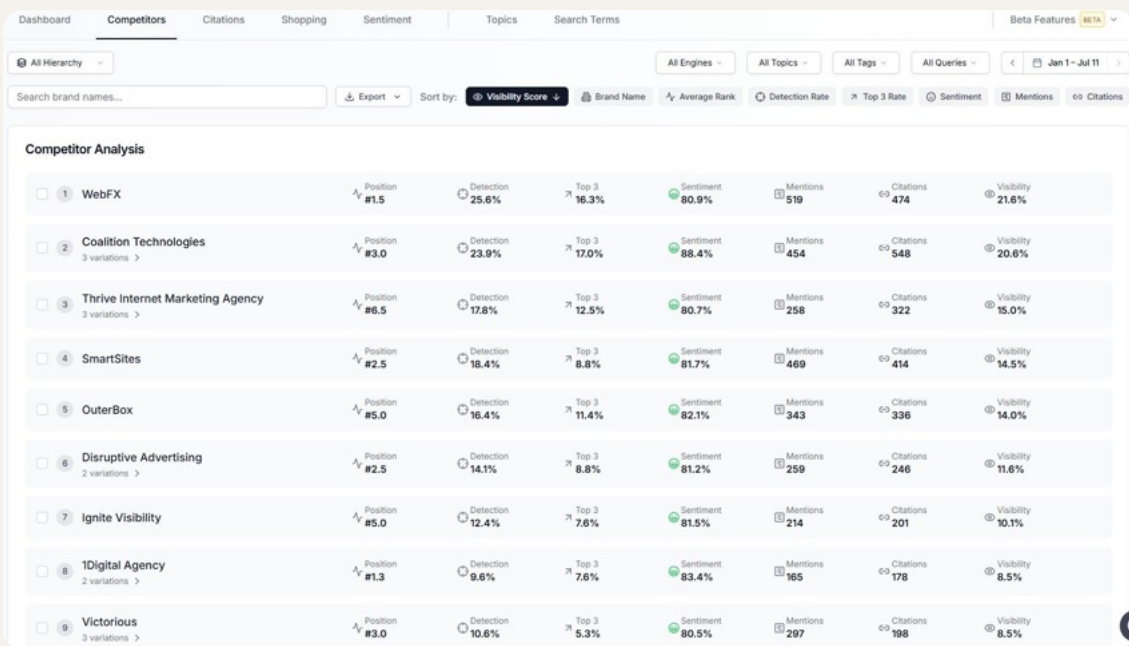


Exhibit 1. RankScale Competitors dashboard screenshot, sorted by visibility score for Jan. 1 to July 11.

2.2.2 The monitored prompt panel

All visibility metrics derive from a fixed panel of 27 natural-language buyer queries monitored through Rankscale across the AI engines; a brand's visibility reflects how it appeared in the answers to these specific prompts. The panel is listed in full below, alongside the number of times each query was run on each engine.

Prompt	Gemini	AI Overviews	Perplexity	ChatGPT	AI Mode
Best AI SEO service providers for startups or local businesses	14	19	17	18	18
best e-commerce digital marketing agencies in US	14	19	18	18	17
best e-commerce marketing agencies for online stores	14	19	17	18	17
best local SEO services for restaurants	14	18	18	18	18
best local website design and seo company	14	19	17	18	18
best pay per click agency for small businesses in US	14	19	18	17	17
best search engine optimization services in US	14	18	18	18	18
best social media marketing company for ecommerce	14	19	17	18	18
digital marketing agency	15	19	18	18	17
digital marketing agency services	14	18	18	18	18
enterprise seo services	14	18	17	17	17
Find a reputable SEO company offering customized strategies	14	19	18	18	18
find top ecommerce digital marketing agency for Bigcommerce	15	19	17	17	18
find top ecommerce SEO agencies for my fashion store	14	18	18	17	19
find top-rated digital marketing company in US	14	19	18	18	18
full-service digital marketing company for my startups	14	18	18	18	18
Professional SEO company for my bigcommerce store	14	18	18	17	17
seo and social media marketing company	14	19	18	17	17
seo company	14	19	18	17	17
SEO company specializing in e-commerce SEO for online stores	14	19	18	17	17
seo company with case studies	14	18	18	18	18
top ecommerce seo agency for clothing store	14	19	18	18	17

Prompt	Gemini	AI Overviews	Perplexity	ChatGPT	AI Mode
top google ads management agency	14	19	17	16	17
top shopify website design and development company	14	18	17	18	18
top website design and development company in US	14	18	18	18	17
What are the best AI SEO companies for small businesses in 2025?	14	18	17	18	18
Which AI SEO company is best for eCommerce stores	14	19	18	17	17

Table 2. Prompt panel and query execution counts by engine. Source: Rankscale prompt tracking, year-to-date 2026.

Its composition is deliberate. Because GEO is a new service line, nearly every agency offering it also sells broader digital-marketing services, so measuring visibility on GEO-specific queries alone would capture only a narrow slice of each firm's footprint. The panel therefore spans the services these agencies actually offer:— traditional SEO, e-commerce, PPC, social, and web development; With roughly half the queries outside SEO/GEO, and most of the rest targeting traditional SEO.

Two anchor terms – "digital marketing agency" and "seo company" – were fixed in advance; the remaining 25 were drawn at random from a larger candidate pool to avoid skewing the data in favor of any one agency.

The few AI-oriented prompts use "AI SEO" rather than "GEO," reflecting how non-specialist buyers currently search. A comparative keyword analysis conducted through KeywordTool.io showed that "AI SEO agency" generated approximately 1,300 monthly searches, while "GEO agency" generated approximately 590 monthly searches. This indicates that AI SEO currently represents the more established search term among users seeking these services, supporting the use of AI SEO terminology in buyer-oriented prompts for this study. While "GEO" is growing rapidly, with a +238% trend increase according to KeywordTool.io, it continues to show lower current search demand. This likely reflects how users instinctively connect a known service category, SEO, with a newer search environment, AI. In contrast, GEO remains newer industry-specific jargon and also overlaps with other established meanings, including geographic and geospatial applications, as well as unrelated uses of the acronym, which can introduce ambiguity in search intent and make it more difficult to isolate demand specifically related to generative engine optimization. These terminology differences reflect the specific market snapshot in which this study was conducted and may change as GEO becomes more widely adopted.

Across the 27-query panel, this amounts to 2,308 total executions over the five engines. Each query was run between 83 and 87 times in total, with minor variation in how many times a given prompt executed on each individual engine (for example, Gemini typically ran each query 14–15 times, while AI Overview ran each 18–19 times). These small differences are a normal feature of engine-level tracking and do not materially affect the relative visibility scores, which are calculated as averages across the runs for each brand.

A potential limitation of the study is the composition of the query panel. Because the prompts selected influence the visibility scores produced, a panel weighted more heavily toward a particular service area, such as e-commerce or enterprise SEO, or toward explicitly AI-focused terminology such as GEO, could produce different results and shift the relative position of individual agencies. The queries used in this study were selected to minimize that effect by representing the broader range of services these agencies offer and reflecting the language used by buyers across different verticals. The resulting scores should therefore be interpreted as a broad measure of visibility across this specific commercial search surface, rather than as an absolute measure of an agency's overall presence in AI-generated results.

2.3 Third-party review reputation

The second variable measured is reputation, and it is measured only from independent review platforms such as Clutch, Google, and Trustpilot, never from an agency's own testimonials. For each firm, the study records the number of reviews and the average rating on each platform, then combines them two ways. A count-weighted average rating aggregates the three platforms into one mean. That mean is then converted into a Review Score using the lower bound of a confidence interval rather than the raw average, which prevents a firm with a single 5.0 review from outscoring a firm with hundreds of 4.8 reviews. Formally, the score uses a normal-approximation lower confidence bound on the mean rating, scaled to a 0–100 range:

$$\text{Review Score} = [\max(1, \bar{r} - 1.64 \times \sqrt{((\bar{r}-1)(5-\bar{r}))/N}) \times 2] \times 10$$

where $\bar{r}$ is the count-weighted mean rating across platforms and N is the total number of reviews. The 1.64 multiplier corresponds to a 90% one-sided confidence level: the score rewards firms that have earned a high rating across a large, and therefore statistically trustworthy, volume of independent reviews.

While these reviews are generally not specific to GEO or AI SEO services, they provide an observable measure of an agency's broader ability to satisfy clients and consistently deliver successful engagements. Because GEO remains an emerging discipline with limited third-party review volume, broader client satisfaction signals provide a more mature and comparable reputation indicator across providers. The full per-agency review inputs and computed Review Scores are reported in Appendix C.

2.4 Verifiable experience

The third metric proxies experience with two verifiable quantities. The first is the number of case studies a firm publishes in its own website sitemap – counted directly and by hand from the sitemap, not taken from a marketing claim. The second is years in business, computed from the founding year.

Case-study volume is a useful signal because it reflects both the amount of documented client work and a firm's willingness to make that work discoverable and auditable. It serves as a supplementary source of client experience, in addition to the above documented third-party reviews. Agencies typically publish case studies when engagements produce results they consider meaningful enough to showcase publicly. While case-study quantity does not directly measure quality, a larger documented body of work provides evidence of a broader history of client engagements and results.

Total case-study volume is used instead of GEO-specific or SEO-specific case studies because agencies do not consistently categorize case studies, and those that do often use different organizational structures, such as service line, industry, client type, or engagement category. A service-specific count would therefore introduce additional inconsistency and reduce comparability across providers. Because a handful of firms publish hundreds of case studies while most publish dozens, the count is log-transformed before scaling so that outliers do not dominate.

Although longevity does not directly measure GEO expertise, it remains a relevant indicator of organizational maturity and accumulated client experience. Additionally, many GEO practices build on established SEO principles, including content optimization, technical accessibility, authority building, and search visibility analysis. As a result, agencies with longer operating histories in SEO have generally had more time to develop experience with many of the foundational practices that contribute to AI-search visibility.

Still, the Experience Score weights case studies at 70% and years at 30%, reflecting that documented output is a stronger signal of relevant capability than mere longevity – particularly in a field as young as GEO, where a firm founded in 1996 does not necessarily have more GEO-specific experience than one founded in 2016.

2.5 The self-serving-listicle risk penalty

The fourth axis is a downside risk. A self-serving listicle is defined, following a consistent counting rule applied uniformly across firms, as a page on the agency's own domain that ranks "best/top agencies" in a category and includes the agency itself. These pages were counted per firm. The count enters the model as a penalty, not a benefit, for the reasons set out in the introduction and developed here.

The tactic works by exploiting a retrieval weakness: an AI system asked for the "best" provider may surface a self-published ranking as though it were independent evidence. But once the tactic is widespread, these pages form an obvious pool of circular, low-independence content – firms citing themselves as proof that they are the best. AI platforms and search engines face the same long-term challenge that shaped traditional search: distinguishing genuine third-party consensus from content manufactured to manipulate visibility. Recent research on LLM-enhanced search engines has begun examining whether similar manipulation dynamics can affect AI retrieval systems and whether robustness against these attacks remains an

active research concern.⁵ The history of web search is a history of exactly such corrections: link schemes, keyword stuffing, and scaled low-quality content each produced temporary gains before ranking systems learned to discount or penalize them.⁶ A provider whose AI visibility is supported by this tactic therefore carries a latent fragility that a forward-looking evaluation should register as risk – separately from, and regardless of, how much visibility the tactic buys today.

Discovery methodology

Candidate pages were identified through a combination of AI-assisted discovery and manual verification. For each agency, AI systems were prompted to identify self-published "Best X" or "Top X" ranking pages where the agency ranked itself among the top positions, with results collected alongside supporting URLs. Additional searches were performed using agency-domain queries and relevant ranking keywords to identify missed examples. All identified pages were manually reviewed against the counting criteria before inclusion. Pages that mentioned an agency positively without ranking it against competitors, third-party award announcements, service pages, and non-listicle promotional content were excluded.

The penalty scales in direct proportion to the number of self-serving listicles a firm publishes: each additional page adds the same increment of risk, so the measure is a continuous gradient rather than a set of tiers with fixed thresholds. This has a deliberate consequence at each end of the range. A firm publishing none, one, or two such pages registers essentially no penalty – a handful of pages is not evidence that a firm relies on the tactic, and may simply reflect legacy, experimentation, or incidental content. A firm in the low-to-middle range, roughly a dozen or so pages, receives a modest penalty consistent with a firm doing some of what current AI retrieval rewards without necessarily depending on it. Firms at the high end – twenty, fifty, eighty, or more than a hundred self-ranking pages – accumulate the largest penalties, because at that volume the tactic is evidently a central part of the firm's approach to AI visibility rather than a marginal one. Crucially, because an agency's internal marketing strategies often mirror its client deliverables, a high volume of self-serving listicles strongly suggests this fragile tactic is a core client offering. This passes the risk of future algorithmic corrections directly onto the buyer.

The penalty is weighted at 15% of the composite and scales in direct proportion to a firm's listicle count, so heavy reliance on the tactic carries a substantial cost – up to roughly 15 points for the most extensive publishers – while a handful of pages costs almost nothing. The penalty is a deduction from an otherwise-earned score rather than a cap: it reduces a firm's total in proportion to how much of its visibility strategy rests on self-referential content, without overriding the three positive axes, which together still account for the majority of every score. Because listicle counts can be measured objectively but intent and disclosure cannot, the penalty is applied uniformly by count rather than adjusted case by case.

2.6 Normalization and the composite score

Every raw quantity is placed on a common 0–100 scale before being combined. Most measures are min–max normalized within the 33-brand cohort, so that scores are relative to the field actually studied rather than to an abstract ideal. Sentiment is the exception: because Rankscale anchors sentiment interpretation to fixed bands (55% and 65% thresholds), it is scaled against those anchors rather than the cohort min and max. Case studies are log-scaled before normalizing, as noted above.

The composite FINAL SCORE combines the four variables with the following transparent weights:

Composite component	Weight	Rationale
AI-visibility pillar (Rankscale)	55%	The most manipulation-resistant capability signal; the study's core.
Third-party review reputation	25%	Independent, confidence-adjusted reputation.
Verifiable experience	20%	Documented case-study output (70%) + years in business (30%).
Self-promotion risk penalty	–15%	Subtracted in proportion to a firm's listicle count.

Table 3. Composite weighting. The AI-visibility pillar is itself a weighted blend (see Table 4).

The visibility pillar is not a single number but a weighted blend of the Rankscale metrics, so that visibility rewards not just raw presence but prominent, well-cited, favorably-described presence:

AI-visibility pillar component	Weight within pillar
Visibility Score (normalized)	40%
Top-3 Rate (normalized)	20%
Sentiment (anchored)	15%
AI Volume – Mentions + Citations (normalized)	15%
Citations-per-Mention ratio (normalized)	10%

Table 4. Composition of the AI-visibility pillar. “Citations-per-Mention” rewards firms whose mentions are backed by linked sources – i.e., trust, not just name-drops.

Citations mathematically enter the pillar through two distinct channels: AI Volume and Citations-per-Mention. Because third-party corroboration is the most manipulation-resistant signal in AI search, the model intentionally compounds the reward for firms earning substantiated, linked sources rather than mere mentions.

The full arithmetic is: $FINAL = 0.55 \times (\text{visibility pillar}) + 0.25 \times (\text{review score}) + 0.20 \times (\text{experience score}) - 0.15 \times (\text{risk, normalized } 0\text{--}100)$. This produces the scores reported in Section 3.

2.7 What this methodology deliberately excludes

Three things are excluded by design. Self-reported GEO performance claims (“we increased AI referral traffic 5,556%”) are excluded because no third party can verify them. Agency-owned properties are excluded as evidence of the agency’s own quality – a firm’s blog ranking itself, or a founder-owned domain, does not count as independent proof. And pricing is not scored, because it reflects positioning rather than capability and is often opaque. These exclusions mean the ranking is conservative: it under-credits firms whose strengths are real but undocumented, a trade the study accepts in exchange for defensibility.

2.8 Example Composite Score Calculation

To illustrate how the scoring model is applied, the following example uses a fictional agency with hypothetical data. The purpose is to demonstrate the calculation process, not to evaluate an actual provider.

Step 1: Raw inputs

The fictional agency has the following observed metrics:

- Visibility Rate: 13%
- Detection Rate: 15%
- Top 3 Rate: 10%
- Average Rating: 4.0
- Number of reviews: 150
- Sentiment: 79%
- Mentions: 287
- Citations: 282
- Case Studies: 40
- Self-serving Listicles: 20

Step 2: Normalize each scored metric to 0–100

Each raw value is placed on a common scale using the cohort's minimum and maximum for that metric (sentiment is the exception, anchored to Rankscale's fixed 55–65% bands rather than the cohort range):

- Visibility: $(13 - 0.7) / (21.6 - 0.7) \times 100 = 58.9$
- AI Volume (mentions + citations = 569): $(569 - 24) / (1002 - 24) \times 100 = 55.7$
- Top-3 Rate: $(10 - 0) / (17 - 0) \times 100 = 58.8$
- Sentiment (anchored): $(79 - 55) / 40 \times 100 = 60.0$
- Citations-per-Mention ($282 / 287 = 0.983$): $(0.983 - 0.412) / (1.248 - 0.412) \times 100 = 68.3$

Step 3: Compute the AI-visibility pillar

The five normalized components are combined using the pillar's internal weights (Table 4):

$$0.40 \times 58.9 + 0.20 \times 58.8 + 0.15 \times 60.0 + 0.15 \times 55.7 + 0.10 \times 68.3 = 59.5$$

Step 4: Compute the Review Score

The score uses the 90% lower-confidence bound of the average rating, scaled to 0–100, so that ratings backed by more reviews are trusted more (Section 2.3). With an average rating of 4.0 across 150 reviews:

$$LCB = 4.0 - 1.64 \times \sqrt{[(4.0 - 1)(5 - 4.0) / 150]} = 3.768$$

$$Review\ Score = (3.768 \times 2) \times 10 = 75.4$$

Step 5: Compute the Experience Score

Case studies are log-scaled before normalizing; years in business are normalized directly; the two are weighted 70/30 (Section 2.4):

- Case studies: $\ln(1 + 40) = 3.714$, normalized to 46.2
- Years in business: $(12 - 7) / (48 - 7) \times 100 = 12.2$
- Experience = $0.70 \times 46.2 + 0.30 \times 12.2 = 36.0$

Step 6: Compute the risk penalty

The self-serving-listicle count is normalized across the cohort range (0 to 101):

$$Risk = (20 - 0) / (101 - 0) \times 100 = 19.8$$

Step 7: Combine into the final composite score

The fourscores are combined using the composite weights (Table 3), with the risk penalty subtracted:

$$FINAL = 0.55 \times 59.5 + 0.25 \times 75.4 + 0.20 \times 36.0 - 0.15 \times 19.8 = 54.8$$

Notes

5. Pei Chen, Geng Hong, Xinyi Wu, Mengying Wu, Zixuan Zhu, Mingxuan Liu, Baojun Liu, Mi Zhang, and Min Yang. Unveiling the Resilience of LLM-Enhanced Search Engines against Black-Hat SEO Manipulation <https://arxiv.org/abs/2603.25500>

6. Search Engine Land. Google Launches "Penguin Update" Targeting Webspam In Search Results <https://searchengineland.com/google-launches-update-targeting-webspam-in-search-results-119295>

3. Results: The Composite Ranking

Applying the model to the 22 rank-eligible providers yields the ranking in Figure 1 and Table 5. Composite scores span a wide range – from 90.8 at the top to 30.0 at the twentieth position – with a mean of 48.1 and a standard deviation of 18.8 across eligible firms. The distribution is not a smooth gradient: a clear leading group separates from the field, a broad middle tier clusters tightly between the high-30s and low-50s, and the gap narrows to fractions of a point in the middle of the table, meaning small differences in rank there should not be over-interpreted.

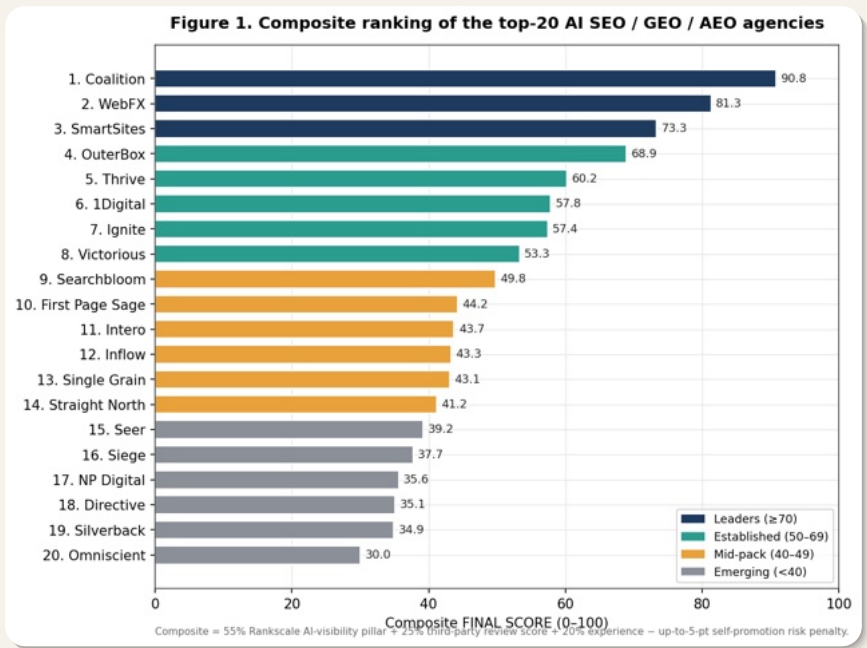


Figure 1. Composite FINAL SCORE for the top 20 rank-eligible AI SEO/GEO/AEO agencies. Colors denote descriptive tiers, not hard cutoffs.

3.1 The four tiers

The scores fall into four descriptive bands. These are interpretive groupings, not algorithmic thresholds, offered to help readers navigate the table:

- **Leaders (≥70):** Coalition Technologies, WebFX, and SmartSites. These three combine strong measured AI visibility with deep, high-volume third-party review reputation. They are the only firms clearing 70.
- **Established (50–69):** OuterBox, Thrive Internet Marketing, 1Digital Agency, Ignite Visibility, and Victorious. Solid on at least two of the three positive axes, with visible AI presence and credible reputations.
- **Mid-pack (40–49):** Searchbloom, First Page Sage, Intero Digital, Inflow, Single Grain, and Straight North. Competitive on one axis but held back on another – often thinner AI visibility or a verification gap.
- **Emerging (<40):** Seer Interactive, Siege Media, NP Digital, Directive, Silverback Strategies, and Omniscient Digital. Frequently strong on reputation or content reputation but currently low on measured self-visibility, and in several cases carrying a meaningful self-promotion penalty.

3.2 The master comparison table

Table 5 is the core dataset: one row per top-20 agency, sorted by composite score, with the headline inputs behind each score. Every quantitative column is a measured or verified value, not a claim. The two eligible firms just outside the cut are

shown beneath the line for completeness.

#	Agency	Final	AI Vis. Score	Top-3%	Avg Rank	Sent. %	Reviews (n)	Case stud.	Self-list.
1	Coalition Technologies	90.8	20.6	17.0	3.4	88.4	438	861	2
2	WebFX	81.3	21.6	16.3	4.0	80.9	666	53	12
3	SmartSites	73.3	14.5	8.8	4.5	81.7	1252	350	0
4	OuterBox	68.9	14.0	11.4	5.0	82.1	193	91	16
5	Thrive Agency	60.2	15.0	12.5	4.1	80.7	306	132	85
6	1Digital Agency	57.8	8.5	7.6	4.2	83.4	101	52	0
7	Ignite Visibility	57.4	10.1	7.6	4.7	81.5	290	35	0
8	Victorious	53.3	8.5	5.3	4.8	80.5	194	48	0
9	Searchbloom	49.8	8.2	4.0	4.6	82.3	197	25	20
10	First Page Sage	44.2	7.2	5.1	4.6	84.7	8	2	17
11	Intero Digital	43.7	2.4	1.0	6.5	75.3	404	53	0
12	Inflow	43.3	5.3	1.8	6.0	80.8	12	10	0
13	Single Grain	43.1	3.1	2.3	4.3	82.9	15	20	8
14	Straight North	41.2	2.1	1.0	6.5	75.9	175	66	0
15	Seer Interactive	39.2	1.7	1.3	5.4	74.7	23	61	0
16	Siege Media	37.7	1.5	0.8	5.4	83.0	59	79	24
17	NP Digital (NeilPatel.com)	35.6	1.1	1.0	4.7	85.5	645	97	27
18	Directive	35.1	2.2	1.0	6.1	76.2	60	35	27
19	Silverback Strategies	34.9	2.3	2.0	6.4	85.0	30	16	50
20	Omniscient Digital	30.0	0.7	0.0	6.4	75.7	36	16	14
— below the top-20 cut —									
21	NoGood	27.0	5.0	3.3	4.7	80.4	14	35	62
22	iPullRank	9.8	1.8	0.3	5.3	77.0	0	6	1

Table 5. Master comparison of the top-20 rank-eligible agencies (sorted by composite). AI Vis. Score = Rankscale Visibility Score (%); Avg Rank = mean answer position (lower is better); Reviews (n) = total independent reviews across Clutch/Google/Trustpilot; Case stud. = case studies counted in the firm’s own sitemap; Self-list. = self-serving “Best X” listicles on the firm’s own domain (amber ≥ 40). Ranks 21–22 shown for context. Single snapshot, YTD 2026, 11 July 2026.

3.3 Anatomy of the scores: where the points come from

Because the composite blends four axes, two firms can reach similar totals by very different routes. Figure 2 decomposes each top-20 score into its weighted contributions, making these routes visible. The AI-visibility pillar (navy) is the single largest driver of separation at the top; review reputation (teal) is broad-based and relatively even across the field; experience (amber) rewards the long-tenured, high-output firms; and the red notch shows the self-promotion penalty subtracted from a firm’s gross score.

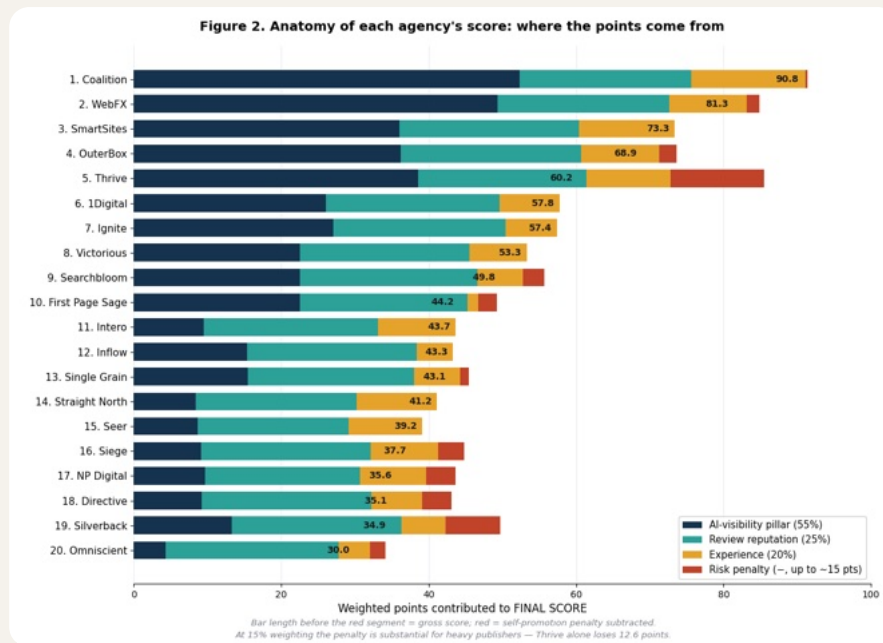


Figure 2. Decomposition of each top-20 composite into weighted contributions. Bar length before the red notch is the gross score; the notch is the self-promotion penalty. The visibility pillar drives the leaders' separation; experience lifts long-tenured firms in the mid-pack.

The decomposition explains several placements. Coalition and WebFX lead because they are the only firms with both a large visibility pillar and a large review contribution simultaneously. SmartSites reaches third almost entirely on the strength of the deepest independent review base in the study (over 1,200 reviews) combined with solid visibility, despite publishing no self-serving listicles at all. Conversely, firms such as Thrive, Silverback Strategies and NP Digital carry visible red notches: their gross scores are pulled down by heavy listicle counts (50 and 27 respectively), the risk axis introduced in Section 2.5.

3.4 How concentrated is AI visibility?

A striking feature of the raw data – easy to lose once scores are normalized – is how top-heavy AI visibility is. Across all 33 brands, the median Visibility Score is just 3.1%, while the top brand reaches 21.6% – roughly seven times the median. The top three brands together account for 28.6% of all measured visibility in the set, and the top five for 42.8%. The Gini coefficient of the Visibility Score is 0.5, indicating substantial inequality: a small number of firms dominate the AI-answer surface while a long tail competes for scraps.

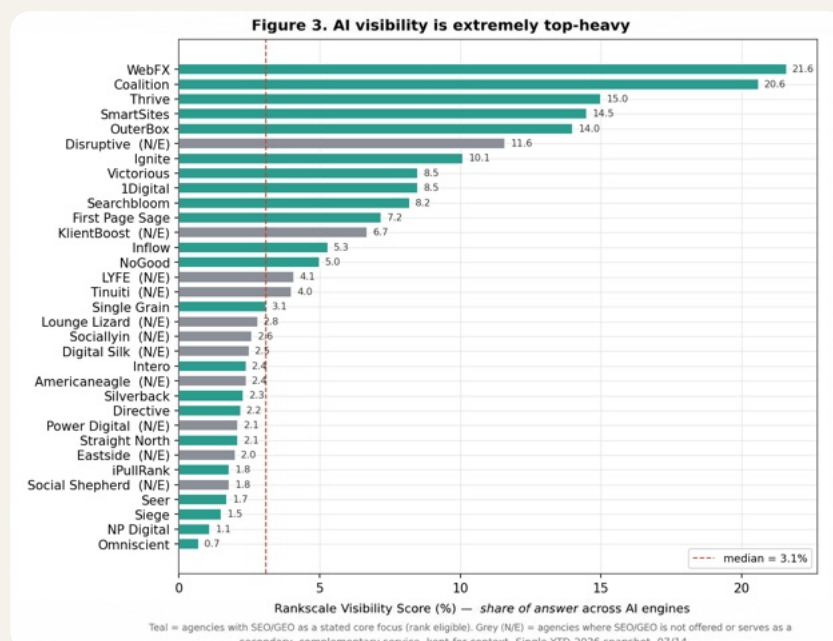


Figure 3. Distribution of Rankscale Visibility Score across all brands studied. The red line marks the median. Visibility is highly concentrated in a handful of firms; most of the field sits in a low, tightly-packed tail.

This concentration has a practical implication for buyers. In a winner-take-most answer environment, the difference between being the first-named agency and the fifth-named agency is large and compounding – AI systems that synthesize a short answer may name only a few providers, and those few capture the attention that formerly spread across a page of links. The leaders' visibility advantage is therefore a measurable proxy for the AI-search presence a GEO client is seeking to build, demonstrated on the agency's own behalf.

4. Profiles of the Leading Providers

The profiles below combine each firm's measured position with the verifiable facts about its GEO offering. They are descriptive, not endorsements. Figures cited are the same measured values as in Table 5.

1. Coalition Technologies – composite 90.8

AI Visibility 20.6% · Avg. answer position 3.4 · Top-3 rate 17.0% · Reviews 438 · Case studies 861 · Self-serving listicles 2

Coalition Technologies ranks first at 90.8, with the second-highest visibility score at 20.6% but the strongest overall profile. Its 3.4 average answer position, 17.0% top-3 rate, 88.4% sentiment, 454 mentions, and 548 citations indicate both prominence and strong source support. The 438-review base is substantial, while 861 case studies, by far the largest among ranked agencies, give its experience profile exceptional depth, with years in business adding further weight. As an SEO/GEO-core provider, it aligns directly with the category evaluated. Only two self-serving listicles were identified, so almost none of its score is exposed to the listicle penalty. The result is the broadest and most durable evidence base in the comparison.

2. WebFX – composite 81.3

AI Visibility 21.6% · Avg. answer position 4.0 · Top-3 rate 16.3% · Reviews 666 · Case studies 53 · Self-serving listicles 12

WebFX ranks second at 81.3 and records the study's highest Rankscale visibility at 21.6%, with a 25.6% detection rate and 16.3% top-3 rate. Its 4.0 average answer position and 80.9% sentiment show consistently strong, though slightly less prominent and favorable, placement than Coalition. A 666-review base provides substantial independent reputation evidence. Its 53 case studies are notably fewer than those of the other leaders, although years in business still contribute to the experience component. WebFX is appropriately evaluated as an SEO/GEO-core provider. Twelve self-serving listicles create modest risk exposure, but the penalty is limited and does not threaten a position driven primarily by exceptional measured visibility and review strength.

3. SmartSites – composite 73.3

AI Visibility 14.5% · Avg. answer position 4.5 · Top-3 rate 8.8% · Reviews 1252 · Case studies 350 · Self-serving listicles 0

SmartSites ranks third at 73.3. Its Rankscale visibility is lower than the two leaders at 14.5%, and its 8.8% top-3 rate and 4.5 average position indicate solid rather than dominant AI-answer placement. Its main advantage is independent reputation: 1,252 reviews, the deepest review base in the study, substantially strengthen confidence in its service record. The agency also publishes 350 case studies, giving it a large, verifiable body of work, with years in business adding to the experience score. As an SEO/GEO-core provider, it fits the category directly. No self-serving listicles were identified, eliminating this source of forward-looking manipulation risk and making its third-place result unusually clean.

4. OuterBox – composite 68.9

AI Visibility 14.0% · Avg. answer position 5.0 · Top-3 rate 11.4% · Reviews 193 · Case studies 91 · Self-serving listicles 16

OuterBox ranks fourth at 68.9, narrowly below the leader tier but with a well-supported established profile. Its 14.0% visibility, 11.4% top-3 rate, and 82.1% sentiment show meaningful AI presence, although its 5.0 average answer position is weaker than the agencies above it. Independent reputation is credible but less extensive, based on 193 reviews. Its 91 published case studies, together with the model's years-in-business component, provide moderate verifiable experience without the scale of SmartSites or Coalition. OuterBox qualifies as SEO/GEO-core and remains directly comparable. Sixteen self-serving listicles create a measurable but not severe risk penalty, suggesting some reliance on self-ranking content while leaving the overall evidence base intact.

5. Thrive Agency – composite 60.2

AI Visibility 15.0% · Avg. answer position 4.1 · Top-3 rate 12.5% · Reviews 306 · Case studies 132 · Self-serving listicles 85

Thrive Agency ranks fifth at 60.2 despite posting the third-highest raw Rankscale visibility at 15.0%. Its 12.5% top-3 rate and 4.1 average position are strong, while 306 reviews and 132 case studies provide credible independent reputation and documented experience, further supported by the years-in-business component. As an SEO/GEO-core agency, its service focus is directly relevant. The central weakness is risk exposure: 85 self-serving listicles, one of the highest counts in the full dataset, indicate that self-ranking content is a significant part of its visibility approach. This carries the largest penalty applied to any ranked agency – 12.6 points – and is the direct reason Thrive places fifth rather than fourth; without it, its score would sit just above OuterBox. That does not erase its measured capabilities, but it materially reduces confidence in the durability of some of its current AI-search advantage.

6. 1Digital Agency – composite 57.8

AI Visibility 8.5% · Avg. answer position 4.2 · Top-3 rate 7.6% · Reviews 101 · Case studies 52 · Self-serving listicles 0

1Digital Agency ranks sixth at 57.8, placing it in the established tier. Its 8.5% Rankscale visibility, 7.6% top-3 rate, and 4.2 average answer position indicate moderate but relatively prominent AI-answer placement. Sentiment is strong at 83.4%, while 165 mentions and 178 citations suggest its presence is frequently supported by linked sources. The agency has 101 independent reviews, providing a credible, though smaller, reputation base than most higher-ranked firms. Its 52 published case studies, combined with years in business, produce a solid but not exceptional experience profile. As an SEO/GEO-core provider, it fits the category directly. No self-serving listicles were identified, leaving its score unexposed to the study's manipulation-risk penalty.

7. Ignite Visibility – composite 57.4

AI Visibility 10.1% · Avg. answer position 4.7 · Top-3 rate 7.6% · Reviews 290 · Case studies 35 · Self-serving listicles 0

Ignite Visibility ranks seventh at 57.4, placing it in the established tier. Its 10.1% Rankscale visibility, 7.6% top-3 rate, 4.7 average position, and 81.5% sentiment indicate credible AI-answer presence, though clearly below the top five. The agency has 290 independent reviews, giving its reputation signal useful depth, while 35 case studies make its documented output relatively limited, even after years in business are included in the experience score. Its SEO/GEO focus is sufficiently central to qualify for direct ranking. No self-serving listicles were identified, so its score carries no penalty from this risk factor. Overall, it is a reputable, low-risk agency with meaningful visibility but less evidence of scale and AI-search dominance than higher-ranked competitors.

8. Victorious – composite 53.3

AI Visibility 8.5% · Avg. answer position 4.8 · Top-3 rate 5.3% · Reviews 194 · Case studies 48 · Self-serving listicles 0

Victorious ranks eighth at 53.3. Its 8.5% Rankscale visibility and 5.3% top-3 rate show a meaningful but moderate AI presence, with a 4.8 average position and 80.5% sentiment. Its 194 independent reviews provide a credible reputation base, while 48 case studies offer a reasonable but not extensive record of documented work. Years in market contribute to the experience score, but do not offset the smaller evidence volume. Victorious passes the SEO/GEO core-service gate, so its capabilities are directly relevant to this comparison. No self-serving listicles were found, eliminating the study's identified manipulation-risk exposure. Its eighth-place standing reflects a profile with no clear weakness other than the one that matters most here: measured visibility below every agency above it.

Insightful cases below the leaders

Three firms further down the table illustrate patterns worth highlighting.

First Page Sage (10) – strong GEO reputation, thin third-party verification

First Page Sage is widely cited as a GEO pioneer and posts respectable measured visibility (7.2%) with the most favorable sentiment among mid-pack firms. But it is the clearest verification-gap case in the study: it has essentially no independent Clutch/G2 review record, and its public proof is largely self-hosted – including self-declared rankings excluded as evidence here. It also carries 17 self-serving listicles. The model reflects this by crediting its real visibility while withholding the reputation points it cannot substantiate independently, leaving it mid-pack despite a prominent GEO brand.

Siege Media (16) & Silverback Strategies (19) – the penalty in action

Both firms present credible, content-led GEO propositions and hold respectable independent ratings, yet land in the emerging tier. The common thread is self-promotion exposure: Siege carries 24 self-serving listicles and Silverback 50 – costing them 3.6 and 7.4 points respectively. Silverback's penalty is consequential enough that removing it would lift the firm five places (Section 5.1, Figure 4). Both also record low measured self-visibility (1.5% and 2.3%), so the model ranks them on what can be verified today rather than on positioning – but here, unlike most of the field, the penalty itself is a visible driver of the result, which is why they illustrate it.

Agencies excluded by the eligibility gate

The three highest-scoring agencies that did not pass the eligibility gate are profiled here for transparency. Each posts a composite that would place it in the upper half of the ranking, but each was marked "not eligible" (N/E) because SEO, GEO, or AEO is not its primary business – a distinction discussed in Section 2.1. Their scores are shown on the same basis as the ranked firms so readers can judge the boundary for themselves.

Disruptive Advertising – composite 57.3

AI Visibility 11.6% · Avg. answer position 4.2 · Top-3 rate 8.8% · Reviews 662 · Case studies 13 · Self-serving listicles 8

Disruptive posts the highest composite of any non-eligible firm, and on raw score it would slot in at #8, between Ignite Visibility and Victorious. The score is driven by a strong measured AI presence (11.6% visibility, a 4.2 average position) and an excellent independent review base (662 reviews at 4.76). But it is excluded because Disruptive is primarily a paid-media and PPC agency; SEO/GEO is a secondary line rather than its core. Its own site reinforces the caution this paper raises about self-promotion: Disruptive publishes a "Top GEO Agencies" listicle on its own domain that ranks itself as the "premier" GEO agency – a self-serving-listicle pattern of exactly the kind treated as a risk in Section 2.5.

KlientBoost – composite 56.5

AI Visibility 6.7% · Avg. answer position 4.6 · Top-3 rate 4.8% · Reviews 678 · Case studies 296 · Self-serving listicles 0

Scored on the same four axes as the ranked firms, KlientBoost's composite would place it ninth – below Disruptive Advertising and above Victorious – on the strength of the single-highest review reputation in the dataset (678 reviews at 4.85, a 96.0 Review Score) and a deep, verifiable case-study library (296). Unlike Disruptive, it carries zero self-serving listicles and maintains a genuine, dedicated GEO service page. It is nonetheless classified N/E because its primary business is PPC and paid media, with GEO offered as one service among several rather than as its core focus, precisely the distinction the eligibility threshold is built to draw. The profile is included here so the boundary is transparent: a reputationally strong firm can sit just outside the ranked set not because its work is weaker, but because its center of gravity is a different service.

Americaneagle.com – composite 54.0

AI Visibility 2.4% · Avg. answer position 5.0 · Top-3 rate 1.3% · Reviews 77 · Case studies 485 · Self-serving listicles 0

Americaneagle would land at #10 based on composite scores, but it did not meet eligibility requirements, but for a very different reason than the other two: its composite is carried almost entirely by the experience axis. Founded in 1978, it has the deepest documented output in the study (485 case studies) and a near-maximal experience score – while its measured AI visibility is low (2.4%, a bottom-tier 5.0 average position). It is excluded because it is fundamentally a web-design and development firm that also offers SEO and, more recently, "AI SEO" workflows. Americaneagle illustrates a limitation of the composite worth stating plainly: a long-tenured generalist can accumulate a high experience score that lifts its total well above its actual AI-search presence.

5. Sensitivity and Robustness

Any composite ranking embeds choices – which weights, which penalty, which normalization. A responsible ranking states how much those choices matter. This section stress-tests the result two ways: by removing the manipulation penalty entirely to see whether it changes the order, and by plotting the visibility–reputation frontier to check that the composite tracks the firms genuinely ahead on the underlying evidence rather than imposing an idiosyncratic order.

5.1 Does the self-promotion penalty change the ranking?

Because the three positive variables carry 100% of the base score and the penalty is a proportional deduction, it reshuffles positions locally without overturning the order at the top. Recomputing every eligible firm’s score with the penalty removed leaves the ranking almost unchanged: the penalized and unpenalized orderings have a Spearman rank correlation of 0.97, indicating that the relative ordering of agencies is preserved. The leaders are identical either way. The movement is concentrated in the mid-pack, where firms cluster within fractions of a point.

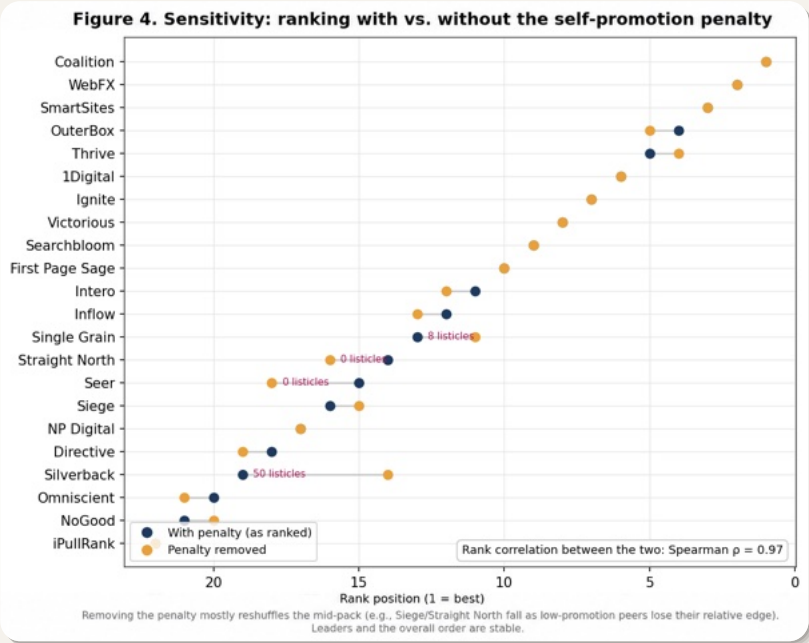


Figure 4. Rank position with the self-promotion penalty (navy) versus with it removed (amber). Rank 1 is at the right. Most firms barely move; the largest shifts are heavy self-promoters gaining ground when the penalty is lifted (e.g. Silverback), and low-promotion firms slipping as their relative advantage disappears (e.g. Seer, Straight North).

Firm (only movers of ≥2 places)	Rank w/ penalty	Rank w/o penalty	Δ rank	Self-serving listicles
Silverback Strategies	19	14	-5	50
Single Grain	13	11	-2	8
Straight North	14	16	+2	0
Seer Interactive	15	18	+3	0

Table 6. The only firms that move by two or more places when the penalty is removed. A negative Δ means the firm rises without the penalty (it had been penalized); a positive Δ means it falls. Heavy self-promoters are the ones that gain most from removing the penalty – confirming the penalty is doing exactly and only what it is designed to do.

The interpretation is reassuring for the ranking’s stability. The penalty is not manufacturing the result – the leaders lead on verifiable strengths regardless. It functions as a targeted adjustment that keeps heavy reliance on a fragile, correction-prone

tactic from being invisible in the score. A reader who rejects the penalty on principle can remove it, and the top of the table is unchanged.

5.2 The visibility–reputation frontier

Plotting measured visibility against independent reputation reveals the shape of the market. Most firms occupy the high-reputation, low-visibility quadrant – they have earned good reviews for general marketing but have not yet converted that into AI-answer presence. The upper-right quadrant, high on both, is sparsely populated, which is the empirical signature of a young discipline: almost no one has simultaneously mastered AI visibility and accumulated deep independent reputation, because the former is only two years old. Bubble size in the figure reflects each firm's case-study volume, plotted on a logarithmic scale because a few firms publish hundreds of case studies while most publish dozens – without the log transform, those few would dominate the visual and the analysis alike.

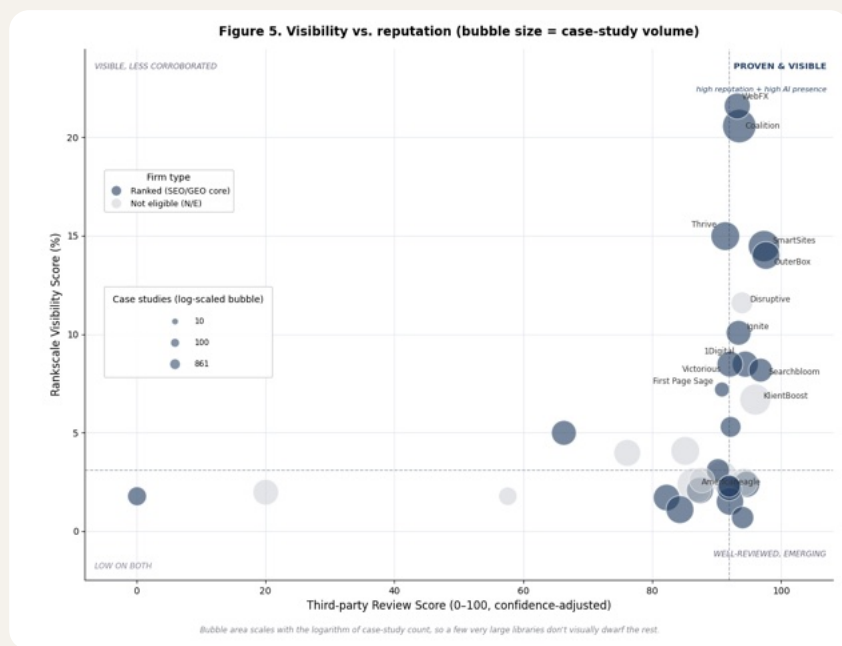


Figure 5. Measured AI visibility (vertical) against confidence-adjusted third-party reputation (horizontal); bubble area scales with case-study volume, shown on a logarithmic scale so a few very large libraries do not visually dwarf the rest. Dotted lines are cohort medians, dividing the field into four quadrants. The upper-right “proven-and-visible” quadrant – high on both axes – contains only a handful of firms, the current frontier of the market.

Nine eligible firms sit above the median on both axes simultaneously – Coalition, WebFX, SmartSites, OuterBox, Ignite Visibility, Victorious, 1Digital, Searchbloom, and Inflow. These are the firms that have begun to convert independent reputation into measured AI presence, and eight of the nine appear in the composite top nine. The correspondence between “high on both raw axes” and “high in the composite” is a useful internal consistency check: the weighting is not producing an idiosyncratic order, it is tracking the firms that are genuinely ahead on the underlying evidence.

5.3 Temporal context

One structural fact frames all of the above: the youth of the discipline. Figure 6 plots founding years across the cohort against the launch of the AI assistant that created the category. The overwhelming majority of these firms were founded years – often decades – before generative AI search existed. Every provider in this study retrofitted a GEO practice onto a pre-existing SEO, PPC, or e-commerce business. This is why the model weights documented recent output above raw tenure, and why it declines to credit any firm for a GEO “track record” that cannot predate the technology.

Figure 6. Most agencies predate generative AI search by a decade or more

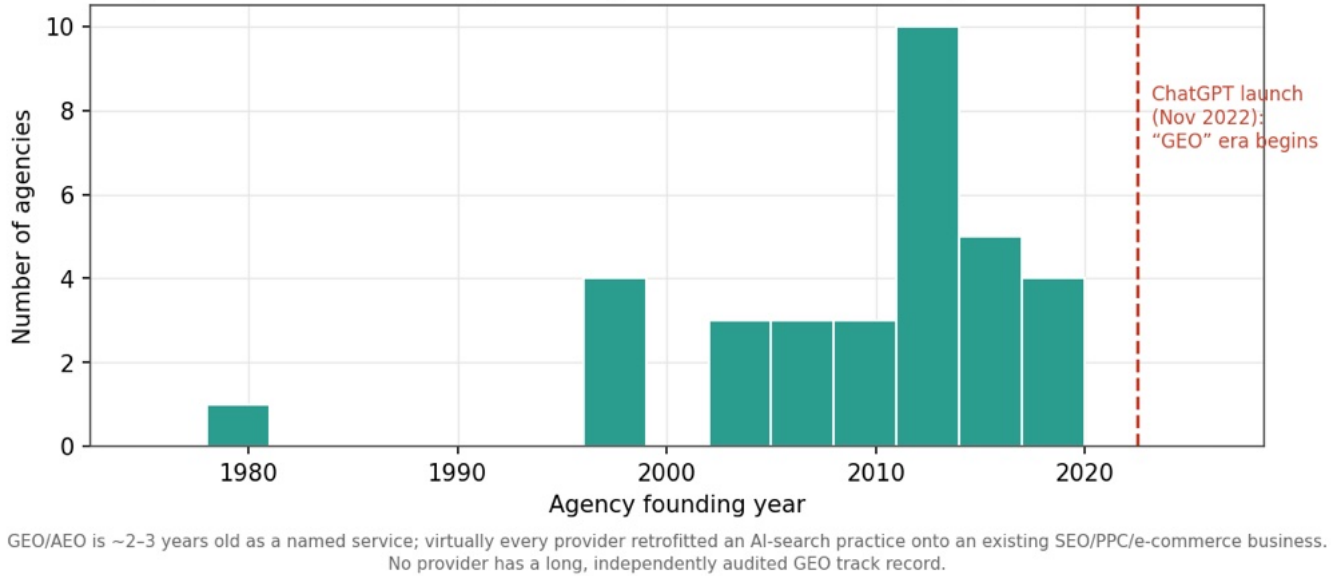


Figure 6. Founding-year distribution of the studied firms. The dashed line marks the November 2022 launch of ChatGPT, the event that created the GEO category. Virtually the entire field predates it – no firm has a long, independently audited GEO history, however long its SEO history.

6. Limitations

This study takes a deliberately conservative approach, and its conclusions should be considered in light of several limitations that also point to valuable directions for future research.

6.1 Single snapshot

The AI-visibility data is a single capture (year-to-date 2026, 11 July 2026). Large-language-model outputs are probabilistic and shift week to week as models are updated and content is re-indexed. The values here are a point estimate, not a multi-week average. As with SEO visibility metrics such as impressions and rankings, a firm's exact Visibility Score may change materially when re-measured as the digital landscape evolves; the broad tiers are more stable than the precise figures.

6.2 Single-account provenance

The Rankscale export was drawn from one agency's account. As Section 2.2.1 argued, the metrics are properties of each brand rather than of the querying account, and the account holder does not lead on every measure. Prompt-panel composition remains a potential source of variation, as agencies may tailor some queries to their service mix and target audience. However, Rankscale's query-selection tools and common industry practices are likely to produce substantial overlap in the core queries tracked by comparable agencies. The selected panel is therefore likely representative of common agency-related searches, although replication across multiple accounts using a shared, disclosed prompt set would provide a stronger test of robustness.

6.3 GEO's Infancy Limits NLP Data for Sentiment Scores

While AI and LLMs' influence on search can go back to elements like Google's Search Generative Experience (SGE, not AI Overviews) announcement back in May 2023, and ChatGPT launching to the public in November 2022, GEO as a service has only been around for about 2 years. This means that the natural language processing used by Rankscale is still (like all AI visibility tools) learning and improving with age and access to data. In reviewing the data, we found occasional cases where the sentiment classifier scored a neutral or positive phrase as negative because it evaluated wording without full context. For example, initially the keyword "complex web development" was flagged as negative for one agency, but when reviewing it in context (which is an available feature of Rankscale), we can see that it's listed as a skill their team has, rather than a problem with the web development. As of its most recent analysis, the term is more appropriately listed as neutral. Because sentiment is only one of five inputs to the visibility pillar, these misreadings have a limited effect on the overall ranking. Future or repeated studies on this subject may show different sentiment scores in early tracking, in either direction, as Rankscale amasses more data and the NLP becomes stronger.

6.4 Agency visibility as a proxy for client outcome

The core assumption – that a firm's own AI visibility proxies its ability to generate visibility for clients – is reasonable and manipulation-resistant, but it is still a proxy. A boutique that deliberately under-invests in its own marketing while excelling at client work is penalized unfairly by this measure. The model mitigates this by blending in reputation and experience, but buyers evaluating a specific small firm should weigh direct client references more heavily than this study can.

6.5 The eligibility and listicle counts involve defined judgments

The eligibility gate ("is SEO/GEO a core focus?") and the listicle count both follow stated rules, but rules require a first classification. The listicle rule is objective about what counts, yet it cannot capture disclosure – a firm that openly labels its self-ranking is treated the same as one that disguises it, even though the ethical postures differ. Applying the penalty uniformly by count, rather than adjusting it case by case, is partly a hedge against this coarseness. Independent recounts could differ at the margin.

Competitive-set construction involved category judgment. The initial Rankscale discovery pool was broader than the final study set and included brands that appeared in AI answers but were not comparable agency competitors. Narrowing that pool to the 33-agency competitive set required categorization decisions based on service focus and market relevance. While the inclusion criteria were applied consistently, the composition of the final competitive set was shaped by, and therefore reflects, methodological judgment.

6.6 Weights are editorial

The 55/25/20/-15 weighting encodes a view – that manipulation-resistant visibility should dominate, with reputation and experience as substantial checks. A reader who would prioritize a different variable – review reputation above all, say – would arrive at a different ordering; the weighting used here is stated openly so that such disagreements can be reasoned about directly. Section 5.1 shows the ranking is robust to removing the penalty; it is less robust to radical re-weighting, which would be a different study reflecting different priorities.

6.7 Author independence

This study was authored by Rankscale, which also provides the platform used to measure AI-search visibility; the study serves in part to demonstrate that platform's capabilities. This constitutes a disclosed interest. That interest, however, lies in the soundness of the measurement rather than in any particular result: an accurate ranking demonstrates the platform's value, whereas a distorted one would undermine it. The same inputs and rules are applied uniformly across all brands, and the composite is reproducible from the published data.

7. Conclusion

The market for AI SEO, GEO, and AEO services is young enough that marketing claims vastly outrun verifiable evidence. This paper's contribution is to rank providers only on what can be checked – measured AI-assistant visibility, independent review reputation, documented output, and exposure to a specific manipulation tactic – and to state every weight so the ranking can be interrogated and reconstructed.

Two observations stand out. First, AI visibility in this market is highly concentrated (Gini ≈ 0.47 ; the top five firms hold 42.8% of all measured visibility), so the leaders' advantage is both real and, in a winner-take-most answer environment, valuable – and because a firm's own visibility is hard to fake for competitive, non-branded queries, it is a useful, manipulation-resistant proxy for the capability an agency would bring to a client. Second, the four measured variables tell genuinely different stories about a firm: a provider can be highly visible yet lightly reviewed (WebFX), deeply reviewed yet mid-visibility (SmartSites), or visible today while leaning heavily on a tactic unlikely to age well (Thrive). Keeping those variables separate – rather than collapsing them into a single narrative – is what lets the ranking distinguish durable strength from borrowed strength.

The top two positions are the most stable conclusions in the study. Coalition Technologies (90.8) and WebFX (81.3) are the only agencies scoring above 80, and the gap beneath them is wide: third-placed SmartSites (73.3) trails WebFX by 8 points and Coalition by more than 17. Below the leaders, the field resolves into bands rather than a smooth slope: SmartSites and OuterBox (68.9) sit together in a clear third-and-fourth grouping, separated from the mid-pack by a further gap of nearly nine points down to fifth place.

That separation makes the two leaders resilient to reasonable changes in method for several reasons. They lead not through one facet but through strength across several at once – WebFX on the highest measured visibility (21.6%) and a large review base (666 reviews), Coalition on the second-highest visibility (20.6%), a substantial review base (438), and the deepest documented output in the study (861 case studies) – so reweighting the individual factors does not disproportionately affect either. The sensitivity analysis reinforces this: removing the self-serving-listicle penalty entirely leaves the ranking 97% rank-correlated with the penalized version, and the leaders are identical either way (Section 5.1).

Changing the query panel or the measurement window is a different matter, and the least predictable of the variations. Reweighting moves scores within known bounds, but a different set of prompts, or data pulled in a different week, could reshape the visibility inputs in ways that are harder to anticipate – potentially producing larger shifts in composite scores, and reordering the rankings more substantially than any reweighting would. Readers are encouraged to test the ranking under alternative panels; doing so would strengthen the analysis rather than undermine it. Even here, though, the margin beneath the top two is wide relative to the swings such changes are likely to produce, and few plausible re-measurements would close it. The precise figures and the order of the mid-pack are the least fixed parts of the ranking; the broad tiers are more stable than the point estimates, and while a different panel might swap the top two positions or lift another firm into contention, it is unlikely to displace Coalition or WebFX from the leading tier. The ranking should therefore be read as this paper has framed it throughout: a transparent, evidence-based lens on a fast-moving market, not a fixed or final verdict.

About Rankscale

Rankscale is an AI-search visibility platform built to help brands understand and improve how they appear inside AI-generated answers. As large language models and AI Overviews reshape how people find information, the questions that used to be answered by search rankings, such as who gets recommended, who gets cited, and who gets left out, are increasingly decided inside generated responses that traditional tools were never designed to see.

Rankscale is built for that shift. It tracks brand presence across 17+ AI engines, including ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude, Gemini, and Google AI Overviews, and reports not just whether a brand appears, but how prominently, how often it is cited as a source, and in what tone. The same measurement approach used throughout this study, a defined prompt panel run repeatedly with every result tied to a stored answer, is what the platform provides to any brand seeking to benchmark its own AI-search visibility against competitors, identify which sources AI engines rely on, and track whether optimization efforts are moving the numbers.

This report applied that measurement to the agencies selling AI SEO, GEO, and AEO services. The same tools are available to measure any brand's position in AI answers. To see how your brand appears across generative engines, visit rankscale.ai.

Appendix A. Complete Dataset (All Brands)

The full audit trail for all 33 brands in the competitive set, including the 11 non-eligible brands (marked N/E) that are excluded from the ranking but retained for context and transparency. Sorted by composite score. Every value is measured or verified per Section 2.

#	Agency	Final	Vis. %	Det. %	Top3 %	AvgR	Sent%	Ment	Cit	Cases	List.
1	Coalition Technologies	90.8	20.6	23.9	17.0	3.4	88.4	454	548	861	2
2	WebFX	81.3	21.6	25.6	16.3	4.0	80.9	519	474	53	12
3	SmartSites	73.3	14.5	18.4	8.8	4.5	81.7	469	414	350	0
4	OuterBox	68.9	14.0	16.4	11.4	5.0	82.1	343	336	91	16
5	Thrive Agency	60.2	15.0	17.8	12.5	4.1	80.7	258	322	132	85
6	1Digital Agency	57.8	8.5	9.6	7.6	4.2	83.4	165	178	52	0
7	Ignite Visibility	57.4	10.1	12.4	7.6	4.7	81.5	214	201	35	0
N/E	Disruptive Advertising	57.3	11.6	14.1	8.8	4.2	81.2	259	246	13	8
N/E	KlientBoost	56.5	6.7	8.1	4.8	4.6	83.5	146	130	296	0
N/E	Americaneagle	54.0	2.4	3.0	1.3	5.0	83.2	36	42	485	0
8	Victorious	53.3	8.5	10.6	5.3	4.8	80.5	297	198	48	0
9	Searchbloom	49.8	8.2	10.6	4.0	4.6	82.3	215	191	25	20
N/E	Lounge Lizard	44.3	2.8	3.8	0.8	5.7	80.6	73	50	270	22
10	First Page Sage	44.2	7.2	8.8	5.1	4.6	84.7	168	163	2	17
11	Intero Digital	43.7	2.4	3.3	1.0	6.5	75.3	54	41	53	0
N/E	Tinuiti	43.6	4.0	4.8	2.8	5.2	82.8	99	79	63	0
12	Inflow	43.3	5.3	7.1	1.8	6.0	80.8	79	68	10	0
13	Single Grain	43.1	3.1	3.5	2.3	4.3	82.9	72	80	20	8
N/E	Digital Silk	41.9	2.5	3.0	2.0	5.9	82.3	66	35	88	2
14	Straight North	41.2	2.1	2.8	1.0	6.5	75.9	85	49	66	0
N/E	Power Digital	40.4	2.1	2.5	1.3	3.7	82.4	45	42	41	6
15	Seer Interactive	39.2	1.7	2.3	1.3	5.4	74.7	35	27	61	0
16	Siege Media	37.7	1.5	2.0	0.8	5.4	83.0	74	44	79	24
N/E	LYFE Marketing	36.6	4.1	5.3	2.5	5.3	79.2	142	175	127	89
17	NP Digital (NeilPatel.com)	35.6	1.1	1.3	1.0	4.7	85.5	56	38	97	27
18	Directive	35.1	2.2	3.0	1.0	6.1	76.2	54	39	35	27
19	Silverback Strategies	34.9	2.3	2.8	2.0	6.4	85.0	52	49	16	50
20	Omniscient Digital	30.0	0.7	1.0	0.0	6.4	75.7	17	7	16	14
21	NoGood	27.0	5.0	6.1	3.3	4.7	80.4	86	40	35	62
N/E	Eastside	26.4	2.0	2.5	1.0	4.3	86.0	39	45	44	1
N/E	Sociallyin	26.0	2.6	3.3	1.8	5.3	79.0	47	39	41	101
N/E	The Social Shepherd	17.4	1.8	2.0	1.8	4.9	87.0	49	35	5	69
22	iPullRank	9.8	1.8	2.5	0.3	5.3	77.0	60	31	6	1

Table A1. Full dataset. Vis.% = Visibility Score; Det.% = Detection Rate; Top3% = Top-3 Rate; AvgR = average answer position (lower better); Sent% = sentiment; Ment/Cit = mentions/citations; Cases = case studies in sitemap; List. = self-serving listicles (amber ≥ 40). N/E = not rank-eligible (SEO/GEO not a stated core focus) but retained for analysis. YTD 2026, snapshot 11 July 2026.

Appendix B. Metric Glossary and Data Sources

B.1 AI-visibility metrics (Rankscale)

Definitions are Rankscale’s own, from the platform’s onboarding and glossary documentation supplied with the dataset. Rankscale (founded 2024) measures AI visibility by repeatedly running a structured prompt panel across multiple AI engines and recording how each brand appears.

Metric	Definition
Visibility Score	Aggregate 0–100 headline metric per prompt group; a brand’s overall AI-answer presence combining detection, position, and citation.
Detection Rate	% of prompt runs where the brand appears at all (mention or citation). Branded detection below 90% is flagged an “entity emergency” by Rankscale.
Position / Avg. Rank	Where the brand appears in the answer: #1–3 strong, #4–6 mid, #7+ weak, or Not Found. Averaged; lower is better.
Top-3 Rate	% of runs placing the brand in the top three answer positions.
Mention	Brand name appears in the answer text without a linked citation (awareness signal).
Citation	Brand’s URL is linked as a source inside the answer (trust signal).
Sentiment	How AI describes the brand: ≥65% positive = healthy, 55–65% neutral, <55% reputation risk.
Share of Voice	A brand’s % of mentions + citations vs. competitors (market benchmark). Underlies the “AI Volume” component.

Table B1. Rankscale metric glossary.

B.2 Derived and verified metrics (this study)

Metric	Definition
Review Score	90 % lower confidence bound of the count-weighted mean rating across Clutch, Google, and Trustpilot, scaled 0–100. Rewards high ratings earned over large review volumes.
Experience Score	$0.70 \times (\text{log-scaled case studies, normalized}) + 0.30 \times (\text{years in business, normalized})$.
Case studies	Counted by hand from each firm’s own website sitemap – a verifiable, discoverable output measure, not a marketing claim.
Self-serving listicles	Count of pages on the firm’s own domain that rank “best/top agencies” in a category and include the firm itself. Counted verbatim by a strict rule.
Risk (0–100)	Min–max normalized listicle count; enters the composite as a subtractive penalty weighted at 15%, in proportion to the listicle count.
AI-visibility pillar	Weighted blend: 40% Visibility Score + 20% Top-3 Rate + 15% Sentiment (anchored) + 15% AI Volume (mentions+citations) + 10% citations-per-mention.
FINAL SCORE	$0.55 \times \text{pillar} + 0.25 \times \text{Review Score} + 0.20 \times \text{Experience Score} - 0.15 \times \text{Risk}$. Independently reproduced to within rounding.

Table B2. Derived-metric glossary.

B.3 Data sources and provenance

- AI-visibility data: Rankscale export, year-to-date 2026, captured 11 July 2026 (single snapshot). Eight export files were provided; all contained identical records in different sort orders, and were de-duplicated to one dataset.
- Review data: Clutch, Google, and Trustpilot review counts and average ratings, read as July-2026 snapshots. Agency-owned testimonials were excluded.
- Case-study counts: Counted by hand from each agency’s own website sitemap.

- Listicle counts: Counted from each agency's own domain under a strict, verbatim rule; figures should be treated as verified floors from a search-and-verify process rather than exhaustive site crawls.

Reproducibility statement

Every input to the composite is disclosed: the four variables and their weights in Section 2, the metric definitions in Appendix B, the full query panel in Section 2.2.2, the per-agency review inputs in Appendix C, and the self-serving-listicle evidence in Appendix D. Because the weighting is stated in full, the ranking can be independently scrutinized or reconstructed under different assumptions. And because AI-assistant outputs drift over time, the visibility figures represent a single measurement window and should be refreshed with a multi-week average before any high-stakes use.

Appendix C. Review Reputation Dataset and Score Calculation

This appendix provides the per-agency review inputs behind the Review Score defined in Section 2.3, so the reputation component of the composite can be reconstructed. For each firm it lists the number of reviews and average rating on each independent platform (Clutch, Google, and Trustpilot), the total review count, the count-weighted average rating across platforms, and the resulting Review Score (the 90% lower confidence bound of the mean rating, scaled to 0–100). A dash indicates no reviews recorded on that platform. Rows are sorted by Review Score, and all 33 brands in the competitive set are included, non-eligible (N/E) firms among them, on the same basis as the ranked providers.

#	Agency	Clutch n	Clutch ★	Google n	Google ★	Trustpilot n	Trustpilot ★	Total n	Avg ★	Score
1	OuterBox	87	5.0	105	4.9	1	3.3	193	4.94	97.6
2	SmartSites	361	4.9	883	4.9	8	4.1	1252	4.89	97.3
3	Searchbloom	100	4.9	85	5.0	12	4.3	197	4.91	96.7
4	KlientBoost	403	4.9	271	4.8	4	2.6	678	4.85	96.0
5	Intero Digital	147	4.8	257	4.8	0	—	404	4.80	94.6
6	1Digital Agency	7	4.8	87	4.9	7	4.2	101	4.84	94.4
7	Digital Silk	50	4.9	48	4.8	1	3.7	99	4.84	94.2
8	Omniscient Digital	6	4.8	30	4.9	—	—	36	4.88	94.0
9	Disruptive Advertising	367	4.8	295	4.7	0	—	662	4.76	93.9
10	Coalition Technologies	162	4.8	253	4.8	23	3.8	438	4.75	93.4
11	Ignite Visibility	173	4.8	117	4.7	0	3.5	290	4.76	93.4
12	WebFX	450	4.9	198	4.5	18	2.6	666	4.72	93.1
13	Inflow	12	4.9	—	—	—	—	12	4.90	92.1
14	Siege Media	46	4.9	13	4.4	—	—	59	4.79	92.0
15	Victorious	119	4.8	71	4.7	4	2.6	194	4.72	91.9
16	Silverback Strategies	25	4.8	5	5.0	—	—	30	4.83	91.9
17	Directive	56	4.8	3	5.0	1	3.2	60	4.78	91.8
18	Thrive Agency	108	4.6	159	4.8	39	4.3	306	4.67	91.2
19	First Page Sage	—	—	8	4.9	0	—	8	4.90	90.8
20	Lounge Lizard	43	4.8	27	4.7	3	4.0	73	4.73	90.8
21	Single Grain	12	4.8	3	5.0	—	—	15	4.84	90.2
22	Sociallyin	65	4.8	27	4.2	2	3.0	94	4.59	87.7
23	Straight North	137	4.7	30	4.2	8	2.8	175	4.53	87.3
24	Power Digital	66	4.8	37	4.4	5	2.5	108	4.56	87.2
25	Americaneagle	10	4.7	59	4.6	8	4.0	77	4.55	86.3
26	LYFE Marketing	156	4.4	357	4.5	109	3.8	622	4.35	85.1
27	NP Digital (NeilPatel.com)	18	4.5	3	5.0	624	4.3	645	4.31	84.2
28	Seer Interactive	4	3.8	19	4.7	—	—	23	4.54	82.2
29	Tinuiti	1	5.0	6	4.5	—	—	7	4.57	76.1

#	Agency	Clutch n	Clutch ★	Google n	Google ★	Trustpilot n	Trustpilot ★	Total n	Avg ★	Score
30	NoGood	1	5.0	9	4.6	4	2.6	14	4.06	66.3
31	The Social Shepherd	—	—	22	3.5	4	3.5	26	3.50	57.5
32	Eastside	—	—	2	3.0	—	—	2	3.00	20.0
33	iPullRank	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	0.0

Table C1. Per-agency review inputs and computed Review Score. ★ = average star rating on that platform; n = review count. Avg ★ = count-weighted mean rating across Clutch, Google, and Trustpilot; Score = Review Score (90% lower confidence bound of the mean rating, scaled 0–100). A dash indicates no reviews on that platform. Sorted by Review Score. Source: Clutch, Google, and Trustpilot, July-2026 snapshots.

Appendix D: Self-Serving Listicle Dataset and Counting Evidence

This appendix provides the inventory of self-serving listicles identified for the fourth evaluation axis. A page was counted when it met all three criteria defined in the methodology: (1) the page was published on a domain controlled by the agency, its owners, or an affiliated entity, (2) it presented a "Best," "Top," or equivalent ranking of agencies or providers, and (3) the agency itself appeared among the highest-ranked entries, typically in the first position or among the first few positions.

Candidate pages were identified through AI-assisted discovery and domain-level research. All identified pages were manually reviewed against the counting criteria before inclusion.

The purpose of this appendix is transparency and reproducibility. Inclusion in this dataset does not represent a judgment of provider quality, intent, or ethical conduct. The associated penalty reflects the potential long-term risk of relying on self-referential evidence sources rather than serving as a direct assessment of agency capability.

Agency	Self-Serving Listicle Count
Sociallyin	101
LYFE Marketing	89
Thrive Agency	85
The Social Shepherd	69
NoGood	62
Silverback Strategies	50
NP Digital (NeilPatel.com)	27
Directive	27
Siege Media	24
Lounge Lizard	22
Searchbloom	20
First Page Sage	17
OuterBox	16
Omniscient Digital	14
WebFX	12
Disruptive Advertising	8
Single Grain	8
Power Digital	6
Coalition Technologies	2
Digital Silk	2
Eastside	1
iPullRank	1
SmartSites	0
1Digital Agency	0
Ignite Visibility	0
KlientBoost	0

Agency	Self-Serving Listicle Count
Americaneagle	0
Victorious	0
Intero Digital	0
Tinuiti	0
Inflow	0
Straight North	0
Seer Interactive	0

Table D1. Self-Serving Listicle Counts by Agency.

Identified URLs per agency

Sociallyin

1. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-analytics-agencies-us/>
2. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-linked-in-content-agencies-us/>
3. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-snapchat-marketing-agencies-us/>
4. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-discord-marketing-agencies-us/>
5. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-executive-branding-agencies-for-social-media-us/>
6. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-whatsapp-marketing-agencies-us/>
7. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-agencies-social-media-employee-advocacy-us/>
8. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-media-thought-leadership-agencies-us/>
9. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-on-site-video-production-agencies-us/>
10. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-brand-monitoring-agencies-us/>
11. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-youtube-influencer-agencies-us/>
12. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-customer-care-agencies-us/>
13. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-brand-storytelling-agencies-us/>
14. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-influencer-seeding-agencies-us/>
15. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-media-reputation-management-agencies-us/>
16. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-creator-management-agencies-us/>
17. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-media-strategy-agencies-us/>
18. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-media-audit-agencies-us/>
19. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-customer-engagement-agencies-us/>
20. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-crisis-management-agencies-us/>
21. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-affiliate-influencer-agencies-us/>
22. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-tiktok-shop-affiliate-agencies-us/>
23. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-tiktok-influencer-agencies-us/>
24. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-creator-content-agencies-us/>
25. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-listening-agencies-us/>
26. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-first-content-marketing-agencies-us/>
27. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-instagram-influencer-agencies-us/>
28. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-product-photography-agencies-us/>
29. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-product-video-agencies-us/>
30. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-amazon-creative-agencies-us/>
31. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-direct-response-agencies-us/>
32. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-creative-strategy-agencies-us/>
33. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-performance-creative-agencies-us/>
34. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-short-form-video-agencies-us/>
35. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-ugc-video-agencies-us/>
36. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-pinterest-ads-agencies-us/>
37. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-x-ads-agencies-us/>
38. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-youtube-ads-agencies-us/>
39. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-linked-in-ads-agencies-us/>
40. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-tiktok-ads-agencies-us/>
41. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-instagram-ads-agencies-us/>
42. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-meta-ads-agencies-us/>
43. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-content-production-agencies-us/>
44. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-community-management-agencies-us/>

45. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-media-management-agencies-us/>
46. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-spotify-marketing-agencies-us/>
47. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-threads-marketing-agencies-us/>
48. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-twitch-marketing-agencies-us/>
49. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-pinterest-marketing-agencies-us/>
50. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-facebook-marketing-agencies-us/>
51. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-manufacturing-marketing-agencies-us/>
52. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-real-estate-marketing-agencies-us/>
53. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-biotech-marketing-agencies-us/>
54. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-marketing-communications-agencies-us/>
55. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-fintech-marketing-agencies-us/>
56. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-tiktok-shop-agencies-us/>
57. <https://sociallyin.com/resources/top-social-marketing-agencies-on-clutch-us/>
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3. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/articles/seo/best-ecommerce-seo-agencies/>
4. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/best-ppc-companies-agencies/>
5. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/best-web-design-companies/>
6. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/best-sem-agencies-companies/>
7. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/best-social-media-marketing-companies/>
8. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/best-seo-companies/small-business-seo-services/>
9. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/articles/seo/best-home-services-seo-agencies/>
10. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/marketing-companies-agencies/>
11. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/best-web-design-companies/cleveland-website-designers/>
12. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/best-seo-companies/dallas-texas-seo-companies/>
13. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/best-seo-companies/new-york-seo-companies/>
14. <https://www.outerboxdesign.com/companies/rankings/best-ppc-companies-agencies/ppc-agencies-chicago-illinois/>

Several pages explicitly disclose that the agency authored the list. One example states that they are not pretending to be neutral, and another includes the disclosure: "Yeah, we wrote this list, and yes, we included ourselves."

Omniscient Digital

1. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/b2b-content-marketing-agency/>
2. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/seo-content-services/>
3. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/best-seo-agency/>
4. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/programmatic-seo-agencies/>

5. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/best-analytics-agency/>
6. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/best-enterprise-seo-agency/>
7. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/digital-pr-agencies/>
8. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/growth-marketing-agency/>
9. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/best-ai-marketing-agencies/>
10. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/aeo-agency/>
11. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/marketing-agencies/>
12. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/best-link-building-agencies/>
13. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/technical-seo-agencies/>
14. <https://beomniscient.com/blog/international-seo-companies/>

WebFX

1. <https://www.webfx.com/industries/professional-services/best-professional-services-marketing-agencies/>
2. <https://www.webfx.com/blog/marketing/best-multi-location-marketing-agencies/>
3. <https://www.webfx.com/blog/marketing/compare-marketing-agencies/>
4. <https://www.webfx.com/industries/tech/tech-companies/agency/>
5. <https://www.webfx.com/industries/recreation-entertainment/best-entertainment-media-marketing-agencies/>
6. <https://www.webfx.com/digital-advertising/learn/top-media-buying-agencies/>
7. <https://www.webfx.com/blog/ppc/advertising-agency/>
8. <https://www.webfx.com/industries/tourism-hospitality/tourism/best-travel-marketing-agencies/>
9. <https://www.webfx.com/industries/finance/best-finance-marketing-agencies/>
10. <https://www.webfx.com/blog/ai/ai-seo-tools/>
11. <https://www.webfx.com/blog/seo/best-seo-websites/>
12. <https://www.webfx.com/digital-marketing/learn/best-ai-marketing-companies/>

Disruptive Advertising

1. <https://disruptiveadvertising.com/blog/business/top-us-digital-marketing-agencies/>
2. <https://disruptiveadvertising.com/blog/business/best-ppc-agencies-in-the-us/>
3. <https://disruptiveadvertising.com/blog/business/top-digital-marketing-agencies-in-utah/>
4. <https://disruptiveadvertising.com/blog/marketing/top-seo-agencies-in-the-us-in-2026/>
5. <https://disruptiveadvertising.com/blog/marketing/top-generative-engine-optimization-geo-agencies-in-2026/>
6. <https://disruptiveadvertising.com/blog/business/top-b2b-marketing-saas-agencies/>
7. <https://disruptiveadvertising.com/blog/marketing/best-saas-ppc-marketing-agencies/>
8. <https://disruptiveadvertising.com/blog/marketing/top-elearning-digital-marketing-agencies-in-the-us/>

Single Grain

1. <https://www.singlegrain.com/digital-marketing-strategy/san-joses-top-5-digital-marketing-agencies-for-funded-tech-startups-in-2025/>
2. <https://www.singlegrain.com/seo/who-is-the-1-the-5-best-ai-seo-firm-reviewed/>
3. <https://www.singlegrain.com/cro/15-best-seo-agencies-integrating-cro-for-user-experience-in-2025/>
4. <https://www.singlegrain.com/search-everywhere-optimization/miamis-5-best-global-seo-agencies-for-international-expansion-in-2025/>
5. <https://www.singlegrain.com/cro/10-expert-conversion-copywriting-seo-agencies-leading-the-market-in-2025/>
6. <https://www.singlegrain.com/cro/8-top-seo-agencies-for-conversion-optimization-strategies-in-2025/>
7. <https://www.singlegrain.com/seo/12-leading-seo-agencies-for-zero-click-search-results-in-2025/>
8. <https://www.singlegrain.com/digital-marketing-strategy/12-leading-seo-agencies-for-rapid-growth-strategies-in-2025-expert-analysis/>

Power Digital

1. <https://powerdigitalmarketing.com/blog/best-digital-marketing-agency/>
2. <https://powerdigitalmarketing.com/blog/best-seo-agency/>
3. <https://powerdigitalmarketing.com/blog/best-ppc-agency/>
4. <https://powerdigitalmarketing.com/blog/best-content-marketing-agencies/>
5. <https://powerdigitalmarketing.com/blog/best-amazon-advertising-agencies/>
6. <https://powerdigitalmarketing.com/blog/best-email-marketing-companies/>

Coalition Technologies

1. <https://coalitiontechnologies.com/best-ecommerce-agencies>
2. <https://coalitiontechnologies.com/blog/reviews-of-the-8-best-los-angeles-marketing-agencies-of-2016>

One of the posts was written in 2016, before AIs. In a separate blog post titled "Self-Promotion Listics: Short-Term AI Visibility vs Long-Term SEO Risk," the agency notes that they "briefly experimented with these kinds of self-promotion listics for research purposes, to study the trend and understand its mechanics," but warns that Google is starting to penalize this exact tactic.

Digital Silk

1. <https://www.dsstaging5.com/branding-agency/branding-trends/best-branding-agencies/>
2. <https://www.dsstaging5.com/digital-trends/page/4/>

The two pages were found on an active staging directory rather than originally being counted only from the primary domain, but those were counted as they are crawlable.

Eastside

1. <https://eastsideco.com/blog/top-shopify-and-shopify-plus-agencies-2026>

iPullRank

1. <https://ipullrank.com/best-enterprise-seo-agencies>

SmartSites

None.

1Digital Agency

None.

Ignite Visibility

None.

KlientBoost

None.

Americaneagle

None.

Victorious

None.

Interio Digital

None.

Tinuiti

None.

Inflow

None.

Straight North

None.

Seer Interactive

None.