

SearchLab Digital Research Reveals New Automotive SEO Challenges for Car Dealers

New studies spanning 2,260 dealership profiles and hundreds of AI Overview searches show most car dealers are unprepared for how Google is changing search.

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, June 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- SearchLab Digital, a boutique local SEO and PPC agency, over the past year released findings from two major research initiatives that expose a widening gap between what Google now rewards in automotive search and what most car dealerships are actually doing.

The research combines the largest Google Business Profile (GBP) study ever conducted in the automotive sector with an in-depth analysis of how Google's AI Overviews are reshaping car-buyer search journeys — and which dealerships are poised to benefit.

The Largest Automotive GBP Study Ever Conducted

SearchLab analyzed 2,260 dealership Google Business Profiles across 20 U.S. cities to identify what separates the top-ranked dealers in Google's map pack from the rest. The findings are striking:

- 20% of dealerships are making a critical GBP category mistake that directly suppresses their local visibility.
- Top-ranked dealers have nearly 2x the reviews of their lower-ranked competitors.
- Small fixes to reviews, GBP categories, schema markup, and department profiles are delivering outsized gains in local rankings.

Most dealers are not executing on the fundamentals that Google is actively rewarding. The gap between first place and everyone else is largely operational, not technical.

AI Overviews Are Reshaping Automotive Search

In a separate study, SearchLab's Dane Saville analyzed more than 300 automotive search queries to understand how Google's AI Overviews are appearing, which dealerships are cited, and what content earns visibility in this new search format. Key findings include:

- AI Overviews appeared in 29% of both informational and commercial automotive queries — but only 3% of transactional queries.
- Dealerships were cited as a top-3 source in 100% of commercial and transactional overviews —

representing a major and largely untapped opportunity.

- Organic ranking position has little correlation with being selected as an AI Overview citation, upending traditional SEO logic.
- Content quality, search intent alignment, and information depth matter far more than keyword frequency or word count.
- For “near me” searches, AI Overviews appear when there is only one dealership of a given brand in a local market — creating visibility opportunities for dealers in less competitive markets.

“Consumers are asking more complex questions during the car-buying journey, and Google is responding with more AI-generated answers and local recommendations. That means dealerships need to think beyond traditional rankings and focus on building a strong, trustworthy digital presence everywhere Google pulls information from. The future of automotive SEO belongs to dealerships that are genuinely useful, authoritative, and locally trusted.”

— Dane Saville, Head of Search and AI Visibility, SearchLab Digital

What Dealers Should Do Now

SearchLab’s research points to a clear set of priorities for dealerships looking to maintain and grow visibility as Google’s search landscape continues to evolve:

1. Audit and correct GBP categories, department listings, and review profiles.
2. Build content programs anchored in genuine consumer intent — not keyword volume.
3. Treat AI Overview visibility as a distinct channel requiring its own content strategy.
4. Shift success metrics beyond rankings to include branded traffic, organic share of conversions, and local visibility.

Access the Research

[The 2025 Google Business Profile Report - Automotive Edition](#)
[AI Overviews in Automotive Research](#)

About SearchLab Digital

SearchLab Digital is a boutique local SEO and PPC agency headquartered in Glenview, Illinois, serving small and medium-sized businesses across the U.S. and Canada. A Premier Google Partner, Microsoft Advertising Select Partner, and Meta Business Partner, SearchLab specializes in helping businesses win in local search through data-driven strategy, rigorous testing, and original research.

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