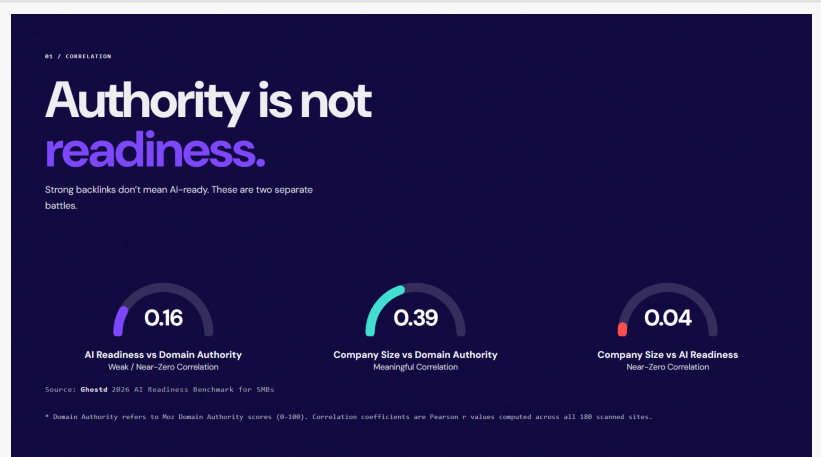


Ghostd Study Finds a Single Missing Line of Code Is Deciding Which Small Businesses Show Up for AI Search

Ghostd scanned 180 small and mid-sized businesses and found that one simple technical fix predicts AI readiness far more reliably than company size or budget.

ATLANTA, GA, UNITED STATES, August 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [A new benchmark from Ghostd](#), a generative engine optimization platform for small businesses, upends a common assumption about why small businesses struggle to compete in the age of AI search. In a random sample of 180 small and mid-sized businesses, the single strongest predictor of whether a website was technically ready for AI systems was a handful of fixable technical details most businesses have never heard of. Company size showed almost no relationship to the outcome at all.



Domain Authority does not mean AI readiness in Ghostd's Benchmark 2026 study

“

The data behind this benchmark gives small businesses a clear, honest picture of where they stand today, and a real path to earning the attention they've always deserved,”
Todd Wandtke

Key findings:

- Company size has almost no relationship to AI readiness ($r = 0.04$), even though it strongly predicts traditional search authority ($r = 0.39$). Bigger businesses are not meaningfully more ready for AI search than smaller ones.
- 58.1% of businesses scored below 80 out of 100 on technical AI readiness, and 13.4% scored below 50.

- Structured data markup (a standardized code added to a webpage that tells search engines what the content means, not just what it says) is the single strongest predictor of a high score, lifting results by nearly 30 points on average.

- 8 of 180 businesses studied (4.4%) could not be crawled by any automated system at all, before AI readiness even became a question.

The benchmark measures technical readiness. It does not measure whether AI platforms currently mention or recommend any business in the study.

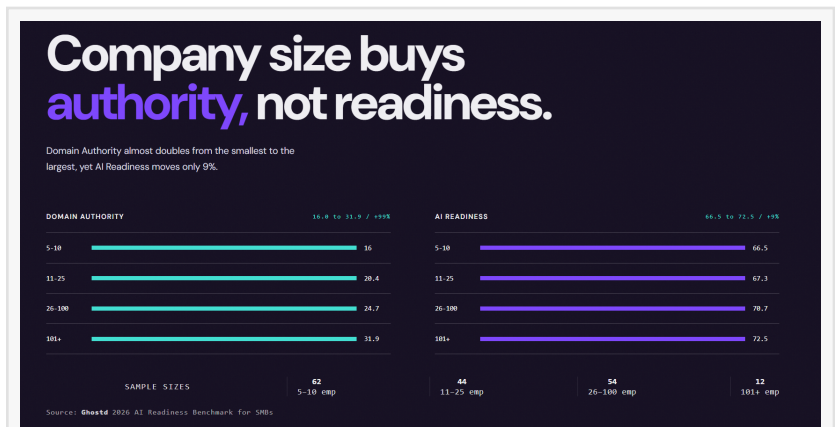
The 2026 AI Readiness Benchmark scanned 180 businesses across ten U.S. cities and twelve industries, measuring whether their websites are technically configured for AI systems to read them. Each site was checked against ten technical signals, including structured data markup, crawler access, and page-level content depth, several of which have long been recognized as SEO best practices. The gap between the businesses that passed and the businesses that failed came down to a small number of specific, fixable technical details.

A business with 400 employees and one with 8 employees have roughly the same odds of passing the benchmark. Structured data markup made the real difference, lifting scores by nearly 30 points on average between businesses that had it and businesses that didn't.

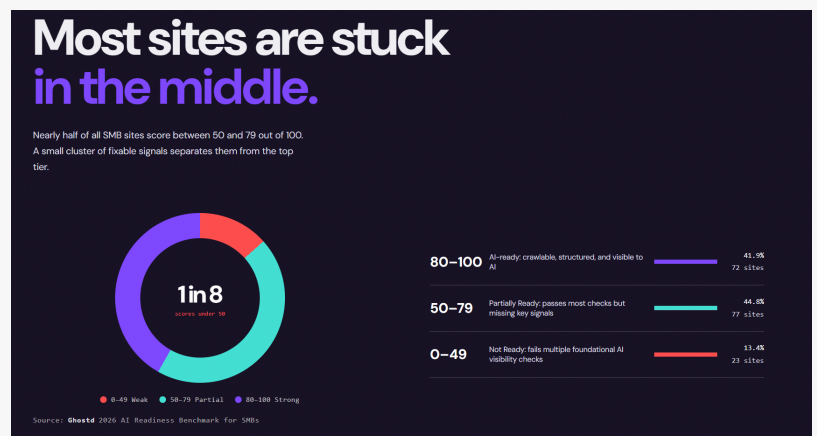
"Small businesses build the products and relationships that earn real trust, and they deserve the same visibility the biggest brands take for granted. The data behind this benchmark gives them a clear, honest picture of where they stand today, and a real path to earning the attention they've always deserved," said Todd Wandtke, Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder of Ghostd.

"Our AI Readiness scan gave us a clear, specific checklist, and within a week we had already closed most of the gaps. For a small team like ours, that kind of clarity is rare and genuinely useful," said Tish Coss, Project Coordinator and Operations Manager at Buckman Enochs Coss (BEC Search), a nationally recognized life sciences and healthcare executive search and recruiting firm that places top leadership, commercial, clinical, and functional talent.

The benchmark measures technical readiness only. It does not claim to measure whether



Company size does not guarantee AI readiness



Ghostd study finds many small businesses are yet to unlock the full potential in terms of AI readiness

ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or other AI platforms currently mention any business in the study. It shows that most small businesses have not yet done the basic technical work that would let AI systems read them clearly, regardless of how well-known or well-funded they are.

Ghostd positions the AI Readiness Benchmark as the first stage of a longer path that includes:

- AI Readiness: whether a website is technically built for AI systems to read at all.
- AI Citation: whether AI platforms actually mention a business in response to real customer questions.
- AI Recommendation: whether AI platforms actively suggest a business as the best answer, not just one option among several.

Ghostd enables all three. Any small business can check where they stand using Ghostd's powerful AI visibility tracking and growth tool.

The free benchmark measures the first stage, and Ghostd's broader platform helps small businesses move from being AI ready, to being cited, and to being recommended by AI, as AI search becomes a bigger part of how customers find them.

Ghostd's free AI Readiness scanner is the same tool used to produce the benchmark study. The full report, including industry-by-industry breakdowns and a complete methodology, is available at ghostd.ai/ai-readiness-2026.



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