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The UK Construction Visibility Report 2026

How findable are UK construction firms? What 50 audits tell us

30%
of AI answers named the business

9%
of contractor searches had them on Google's page one

42%
of the top five went to directories and platforms

we are smc

Steve Mark · wearesmc.co.uk/guides/construction-visibility-report-2026/

IN SHORT

50 businesses, 2,717 AI answers, 408 Google searches

We put 2,717 buyer questions to six AI tools and ran 408 Google searches for 50 UK construction, civils and trades businesses. This is what a buyer actually sees when they go looking for a firm like yours, and what the firms that get found do differently.

AI tools named the business in **30%** of answers to buyer questions about its own work. Google put a contractor on page one for **9%** of searches for what it does. Directories, trade bodies and social sites took **42%** of the top five results.

The firms AI names most are not the ones with the best websites. They are the ones other websites talk about. And being ready for a tender, with every policy and accreditation on show, made little difference to how findable a contractor was.

30%

Named by AI

AI tools named the business in 809 of 2,717 answers to buyer questions about its own work and area.

9%

On Google's page one

of searches for what a contractor does put it on page one. 26 of the 42 contractors were on page one for none.

42%

Taken by directories

of the top five Google results for contractor searches went to directories, trade bodies, job boards and social sites.

4%

Cited by AI Overviews

of contractor searches had a Google AI Overview citing the firm's own site. Google showed an Overview on 71%.

35%

Described wrongly

of AI descriptions of a contractor got something wrong or left a gap. Size was the most common mistake.

2 of 42

Capability statements

contractors offered a capability statement a buyer could download from their website.

14x

The authority gap

more websites link to the ten most-named contractors than to the ten least-named, comparing the middle firm of each group.

37 of 42

Slow on a phone

contractor homepages took longer than 4 seconds to show their main content in Google's phone test.

WHY THIS DATA IS DIFFERENT

Most reports on construction marketing are surveys: firms telling a researcher what they think they do. This is not a survey. Every figure here comes from a live check of what a buyer sees.

It comes from real audits

Each business went through the same engine that writes our free website and tender-ready audits. Nobody filled in a form about themselves. We looked, the way a buyer would.

Real buyer questions, six AI tools

We asked 443 different questions a buyer would ask, written for each firm's own work and area, and put each one to ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Claude, Google AI Overviews and Google AI Mode.

Every search checked twice

Google results move between checks minutes apart. Each search ran twice, and a position only counts where both checks agreed.

Every website finding has a quote

When we say a website shows a policy or an accreditation, the audit found the words on the page. Where it could not, it says no.

Who is in the 50

42	**civils and construction contractors**	Medium and large firms selected from Companies House accounts, working across the UK, plus one contractor audited on request.
6	**local trades businesses**	Plumbers, heating engineers, a garden designer and a carpet cleaner, audited on request.
2	**construction suppliers**	Tool and plant hire for builders, and CIS compliance for contractors, audited on request.

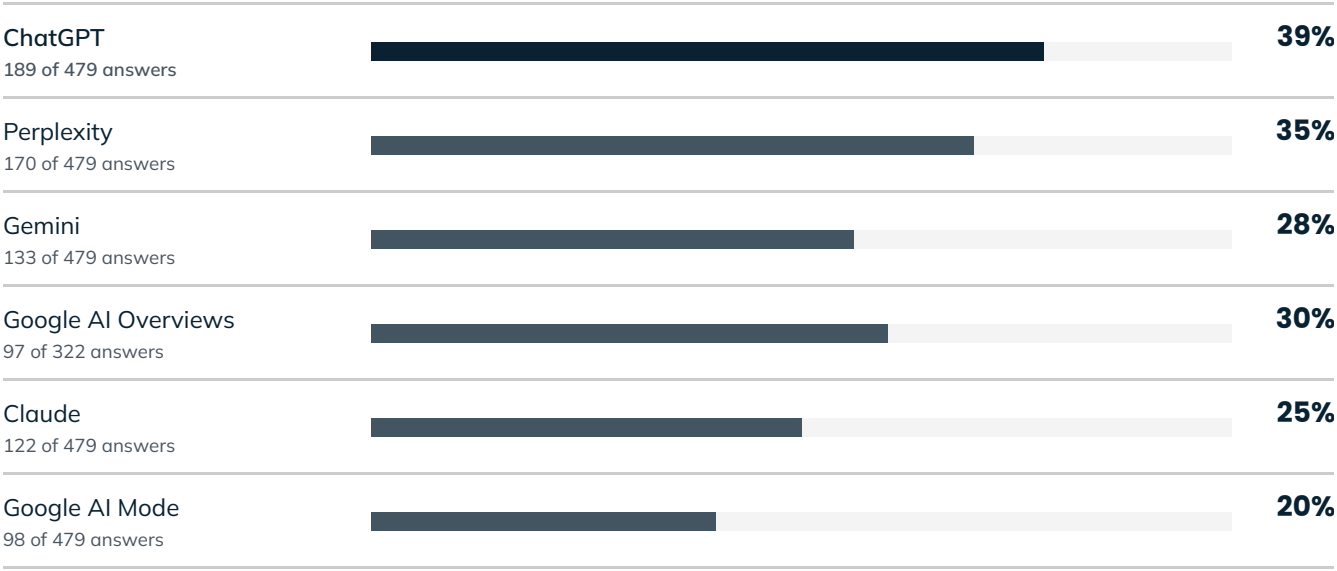
Fieldwork ran from 20 October to 4 November 2026. No business is named in this report, and none will be. Where a finding covers only the 42 contractors, we say so.

FINDING 1

AI names you about three times in ten, and it depends which tool your buyer uses

When a buyer asked an AI tool to recommend a firm for the exact work one of our 50 does, in the area it does it, the tool named that firm in 30% of answers. Its own website was linked as a source in 22%.

Share of answers that named the business, by AI tool



All 50 businesses, 2,717 answers. Google only writes an AI Overview for some questions, so it answered fewer.

- The range was huge: from 2% of answers for the least-named business to 80% for the most-named.
- 17 of the 50 were named in fewer than one answer in five. 8 were named in half or more.
- ChatGPT named the business most often. Google AI Mode named it least, in 20% of answers, even though it draws on the same index as Google search.

HOW IT WORKS

Where an AI tool gets its shortlist

An AI tool does not know your firm the way a client does. When a buyer asks for a recommendation, it searches the web, reads the pages it finds, and names the firms those pages make it confident about.

So it favours firms whose own pages say plainly what they do and where, and firms that other trusted sites mention. Each tool searches and weighs pages differently, which is why the same question can name you on one and not the other.

What it means for you

- Your buyer's choice of tool changes whether you are on the shortlist. Check more than one.
- Being named is not the same as being recommended first, but it is the price of entry. A firm that is never named is never considered.

- Your own site being cited as a source is the strongest signal you can influence directly. It means the tool read your page and trusted it.

FINDING 2

Google's page one belongs to directories, not contractors

We searched Google the way a buyer would, for each contractor's disciplines in the regions it works: 273 searches whose two checks agreed. The contractor was on page one for 25 of them, 9%.

- 26 of the 42 contractors were not on page one for any search for what they do.
- 42% of the top five results went to third parties: directories, trade bodies, business data sites, job boards and social media.
- For local trades it was 58%, led by Checkatrade, Facebook, TrustATrader and Yell.

The sites seen most often in the top five, contractor searches

Site	What it is	Times in the top five
construction.co.uk	Directory	75
yell.com	Directory	63
ceca.co.uk	Trade body	55
facebook.com	Social media	44
directory.highwaysindustry.com	Directory	38
revenuebase.ai	Business data site	32

QUICK WIN

If you can't own page one yet, be on the pages that do

Google has already decided these directories and trade bodies answer the search. A complete, accurate listing on them puts your name on page one this month, while your own pages earn their place.

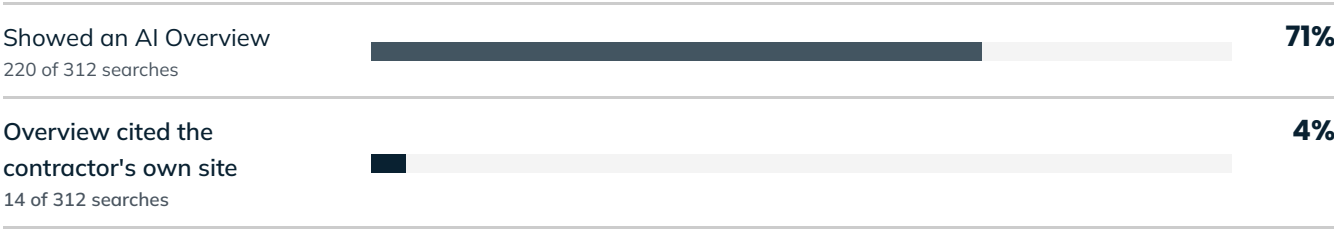
Use the same company name, address and phone number on every one, describe your disciplines and regions in the words buyers search, and link back to your website.

FINDING 3

Google writes an answer on most contractor searches, and rarely cites the contractor

Google showed an AI Overview at the top of 71% of contractor searches (220 of 312). The contractor's own website was cited as a source in 14 of them.

Contractor searches on Google



- On most searches for your work, a buyer now reads Google's summary before they see a single result.
- Overviews cite pages that answer the search plainly: a page for a discipline in a region, a project with its scope and value, a straight answer to a common question.
- A homepage that says "delivering excellence across the UK" gives Google nothing to quote.

FINDING 4

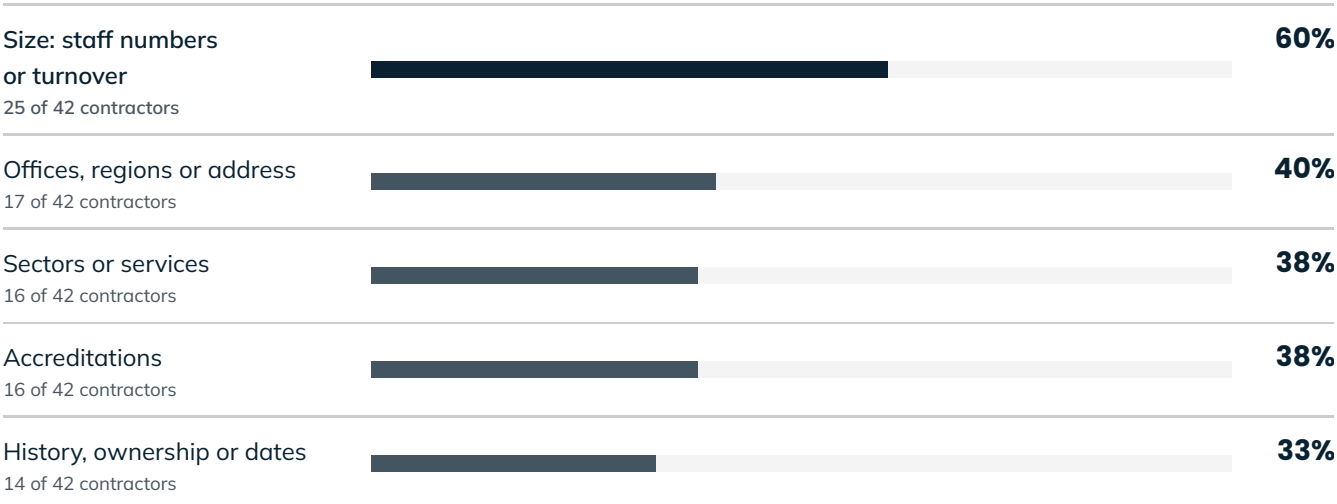
AI mostly knows who you are, and often gets your size wrong

We asked each of the six tools what it could tell a buyer about each of the 42 contractors, then checked every answer against the firm's own website and its Companies House record. That gave 252 descriptions.

165	79	2	6
Accurate	**Partly right**	**Wrong**	**No answer**

65% were accurate. Only 8 of the 42 contractors were described accurately by all six tools.

Contractors with at least one description getting this wrong



The kind of mistakes we found

- A firm with more than 250 people on its own site described as having about 50 direct employees.
- An employee-owned business described as family-owned, or as privately controlled.

- A head office address that is not the firm's current one.
- Turnover and headcount taken from business data websites instead of the firm's own figures.
- Sectors and regions the firm does not work in, and accreditations it does not hold in full.

QUICK WIN

Write your facts down in one place

When your own site does not state a fact, AI tools fill the gap from wherever they can find it, often a business data website with old or estimated figures.

Give them one page to trust: headcount, turnover band, offices, sectors, regions, ownership, founding year and every accreditation with its scope. Then make Companies House, LinkedIn and your directory listings say the same thing.

FINDING 5

Being bid-ready doesn't make you findable

Every contractor got two scores out of 100: how tender-ready its website is for a procurement team, and how discoverable it is on Google and AI. Tender readiness averaged 64. Discoverability averaged 45.

Scores out of 100, 42 contractors

	Average	Lowest	Highest
Tender readiness	64	19	96
Discoverability	45	19	65

- The firms in the top half for tender readiness were barely more discoverable than the bottom half: 47 against 43.
- Firms with more project pages scored much higher on tender readiness. They were no more likely to be named by AI.
- A contractor can have every policy, accreditation and case study a procurement team wants, and still be invisible to the buyer who has not heard of it yet.

> These are two different jobs. Tender readiness gets you through the door once a buyer has found you. Discoverability decides whether they find you at all. Most firms we see have put their effort into the first and assumed it covers the second. It doesn't.
>
> Steve Mark, founder of We Are SMC

FINDING 6

What the most-named contractors have in common: other people talk about them

We compared the ten contractors AI named most often with the ten it named least. Their websites were not that different. Their reputation on the wider web was.

The ten most-named contractors against the ten least-named

	Ten most-named	Ten least-named
Share of AI answers naming them	59%	6%
AI answers linking to their own site	43%	6%
Websites linking to them (middle firm)	1,486	103
Google searches with them on page one	21%	3%
Tender readiness score (average)	70	64
Project pages on their site (middle firm)	30	20

- Across all 42 contractors, firms with 190 or more websites linking to them were named in 37% of AI answers. Those with fewer were named in 23%.
- Bigger, older firms tend to have more links, so links are not the whole story. But the gap in links between the two groups is far wider than the gap in anything on their own websites.

WHAT EARNS IT

Mentions you can actually win

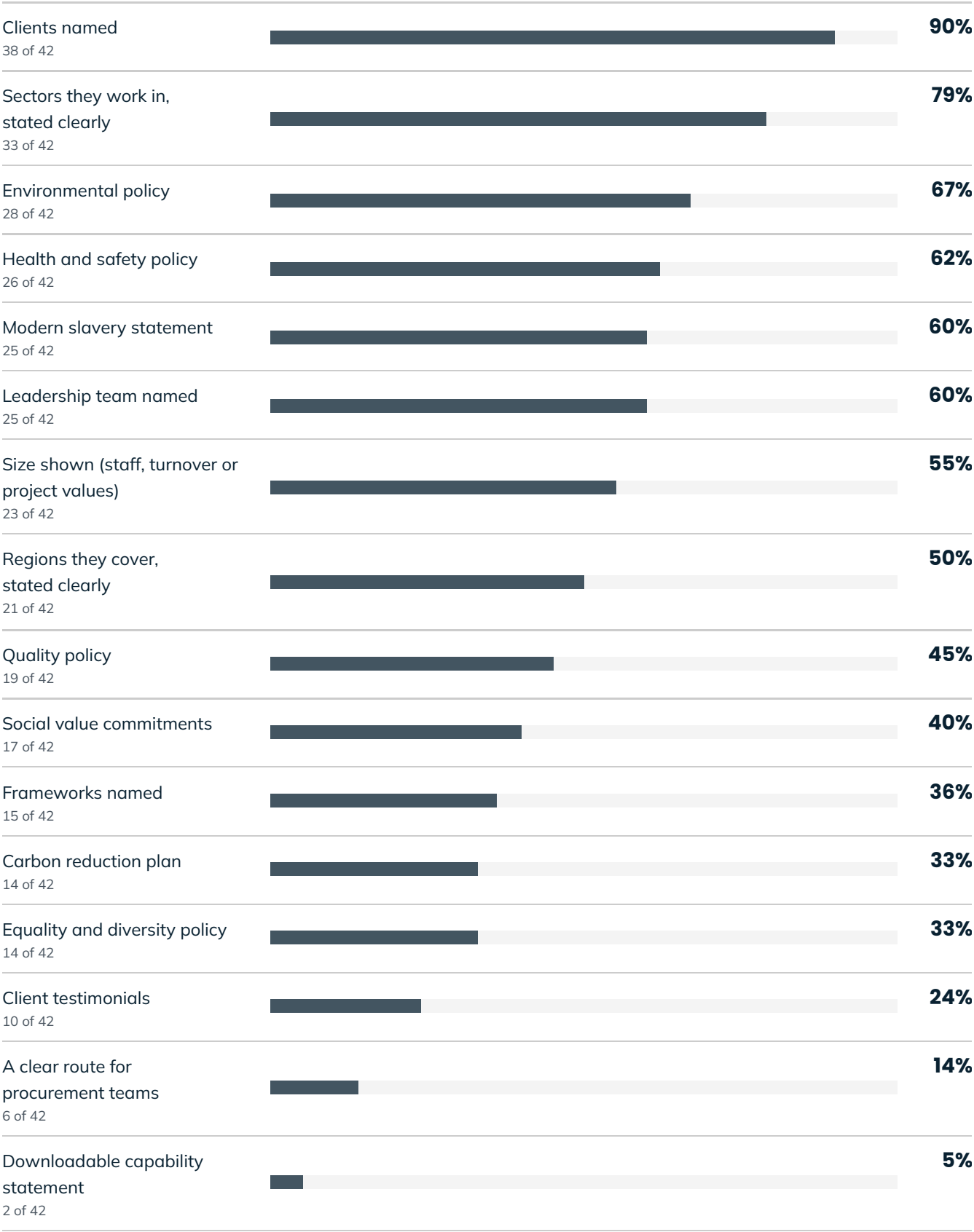
- A project story in the trade press, with the client's agreement.
- Your profile and case studies on the sites of the trade bodies you belong to.
- A mention on your clients', main contractors' and framework partners' websites when you deliver for them.
- Award entries, technical papers and talks at regional events.
- Supplier case studies: the plant, materials and software firms you use want stories too.
- Local news when you hire apprentices, open a depot or finish a community project.

FINDING 7

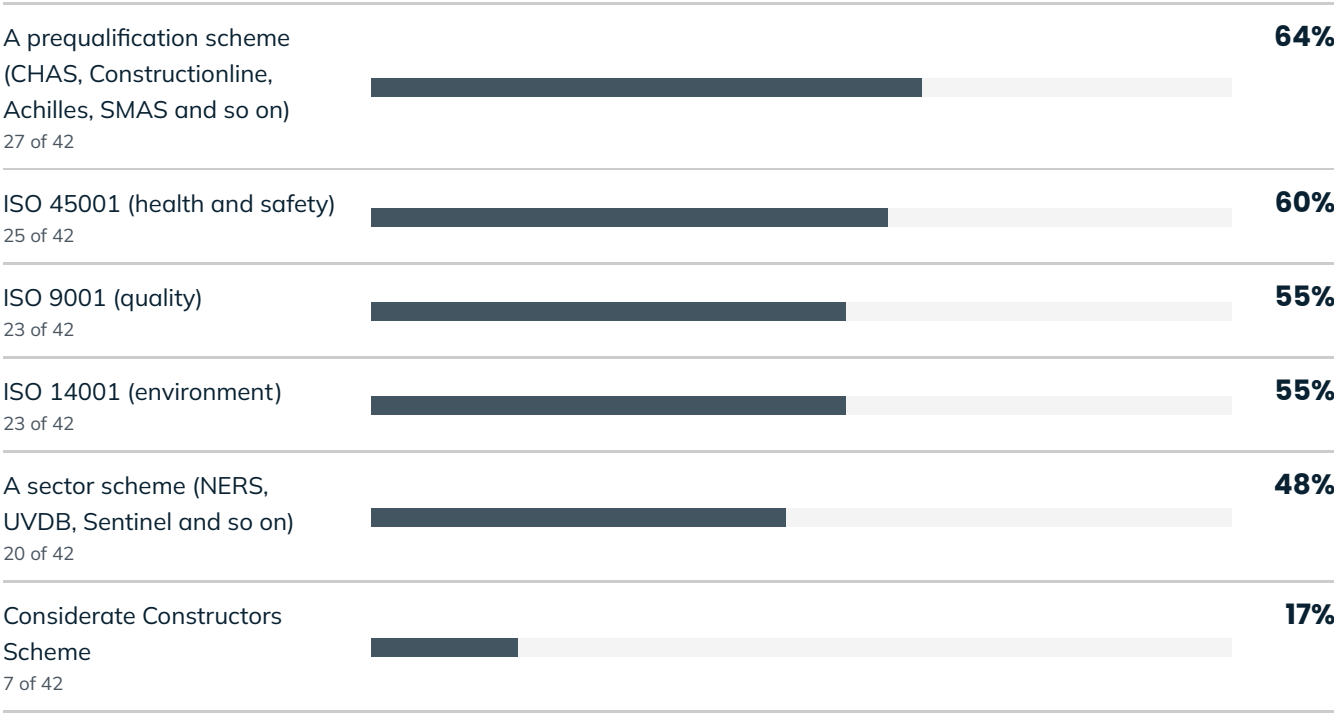
The procurement checklist: what 42 contractor websites show a buyer

Before a procurement team shortlists you, it checks your website. We looked for what it looks for, and only counted an item where the website showed it in full.

Share of contractor websites showing each item in full



Accreditations a buyer could find on the website



- 37 of the 42 had project case studies. 5 had no project pages at all.
- Only 15 contractors' case studies showed social value, though public sector tenders often score it.
- Only 14 showed a carbon reduction plan. Central government asks for one on contracts worth more than £5 million a year.
- A clear route in for procurement teams, such as a named contact or a supply chain page, was on 6 websites.

QUICK WIN

Build the procurement pack once

One page, linked from your main menu, that a procurement team can work through in five minutes: your accreditations with certificate numbers and expiry dates, your policies as downloads, your carbon reduction plan, your modern slavery statement, your insurances, and a capability statement.

Most firms already have every one of these documents. They are just not on the website.

FINDING 8

Slow on a phone, and hard for machines to read

- 37 of 42 contractor homepages took longer than 4 seconds to show their main content in Google's phone test. The middle site took 8.4 seconds. Google rates over 4 seconds as poor.
- 19 of the 42 had the structured data that tells Google and AI tools who the company is, where it is and what it does. 11 had no structured data at all.

Google's phone test simulates a mid-range phone on a slow mobile connection. Real visitors on fast connections will often see the page sooner, but Google only had real-visitor data for a minority of these sites.

FIELD NOTES

Local trades and suppliers: a smaller snapshot

Eight of our 50 were local trades businesses and construction suppliers. That is too few to generalise from, so treat these as field notes rather than a benchmark.

- AI tools named them in 27% of answers to local buyer questions, close to the contractors' figure.
- Google AI Mode named them in just 8% of answers (5 of 59).
- They were on Google's page one for 15% of searches for their services in their own towns.
- Directories, Google's own listings and social sites took 58% of the top five results. Checkatrade alone appeared 54 times.

WHAT TO DO

What to do: ten steps, in order

The order matters. The first steps cost nothing but an afternoon, and each one makes the next work harder for you.

01

Ask the AI tools yourself

Put three questions your buyers would ask to ChatGPT, Gemini and Google. Write down who gets named. That is your real competition.

02

Write your facts page

Headcount, turnover band, offices, sectors, regions, ownership and accreditations on one page, in plain sentences. Then make Companies House and LinkedIn match.

03

Fix the listings Google already ranks

Claim and complete your profile on the directories and trade body sites that show up for your searches. Same name, address and phone everywhere.

04

Build the procurement pack

Policies, carbon reduction plan, modern slavery statement, insurances, accreditations with expiry dates and a capability statement, on one page from the main menu.

05

Name a route for procurement teams

A named person or a supply chain page, so a buyer knows who to ask for documents without filling in a general contact form.

06

Turn projects into answers

One page per project with the client, scope, value, programme, outcome and social value. Write the title the way a buyer would search for that kind of job.

07

Give each discipline and region a page

If you want to be found for drainage in Yorkshire, you need a page that says you do drainage in Yorkshire, with the projects to prove it.

08

Earn mentions on other sites

Trade press, trade bodies, clients, frameworks and suppliers. One good placement a month moves you faster than another month of website changes.

09

Speed up the homepage on a phone

Compress the hero image or video, cut the plug-ins you don't use, and test it on Google's PageSpeed Insights until the main content shows inside 4 seconds.

10

Add Organization structured data

A short block of code that tells machines your name, logo, address, contact details and social profiles. Your web developer can add it in an hour.

Then check again in three months. AI answers and Google results change, and the only way to know if the work is landing is to ask the same questions again.

METHOD

How we did it

The sample

42 civils and construction contractors: 41 medium and large firms chosen from Companies House accounts and checked by hand, and one audited on request. 6 local trades businesses and 2 construction suppliers, all audited on request. Where a business was audited twice, we used one audit. Businesses outside construction and the trades were left out. The pool includes two of our own clients; leaving them out moves no headline figure by more than a point.

The AI questions

For each business we wrote buyer questions for its own disciplines and area, such as a procurement manager asking for a piling contractor for a flood defence scheme in the North West. Each was put to ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Claude, Google AI Overviews and Google AI Mode. A business counts as named when the answer named it or linked to its website. 2,717 answers in all.

The Google searches

Searches for each business's services in the places it works, run from the UK. Each ran twice, and a position counts only where both checks agreed. Page one means the top ten results or Google's map box. 408 searches in all, 358 with agreeing checks.

The descriptions

Each AI tool was asked what it could tell a buyer about the contractor. Each answer was judged against the firm's website and Companies House record as accurate, partly right, wrong or no answer.

The websites

The key pages of each contractor's website were read, along with the documents they link to. An item counts only where the audit found the words on the page; partial matches are counted as not shown. Project pages were sampled, up to ten case studies per firm.

Links, speed and structure

Linking websites come from a backlink index and are estimates. Speed is Google's PageSpeed Insights phone test of each homepage. Structured data was read from the homepage and key pages.

WHAT THIS CAN'T TELL YOU

- It is a snapshot. AI answers and Google results change daily, and we checked each business once.
- 42 contractors is a useful sample; 8 local trades businesses and suppliers is a small one. The contractors were chosen from Companies House; the others asked for an audit, so they are not a random sample.
- Comparisons show what goes together, not what causes what. Bigger firms tend to have more of everything.

Using this research

You are welcome to quote these findings and reproduce the charts, with credit to We Are SMC and a link to this page.

Journalists and trade bodies: if you'd like a figure broken down differently, or want to talk to Steve about what it means for your readers or members, get in touch through our contact page.

wearesmc.co.uk/contact/

Sources

- GOV.UK: PPN 006, taking account of carbon reduction plans in the procurement of major government contracts: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ppn-006-taking-account-of-carbon-reduction-plans-in-the-procurement-of-major-government-contracts/ppn-006-taking-account-of-carbon-reduction-plans-html
- GOV.UK: Publish an annual modern slavery statement: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/publish-an-annual-modern-slavery-statement
- Google: PageSpeed Insights: https://pagespeed.web.dev/

SEE YOUR OWN NUMBERS

Every check in this report, run on your firm.

Our free tender-ready audit for civils and construction firms, and our free website audit for trades businesses, come back as a short report with your scores and what to fix first.

wearesmc.co.uk/tender-ready-audit/
wearesmc.co.uk/book-a-call/

we are smc

We Are SMC is the growth partner for UK construction, civils and trades businesses.
Steve Mark Consultancy Ltd, trading as We Are SMC.