

# The North Atlanta Digital Presence Gap

What Census Business Data Shows About How Many Local Businesses in Gwinnett, Forsyth, Cherokee, and Hall Counties Are Effectively Invisible When Customers Search Online

Prepared by Make It Loud Digital Marketing | Buford, Georgia Atlanta's Trusted Digital Marketing Agency Since 2004 | Google Partner

Data Sources: U.S. Census Bureau County Business Patterns (CBP) 2023 | Census Nonemployer Statistics (NES) 2023 | BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2024 | Clutch Small Business Website Research 2026 | Zippia Local Business Discovery Statistics

|                                                         |                                                                |                                                       |                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 47,471                                                  | 8,070+                                                         | 23,700+                                               | 99%                                                    |
| employer businesses across 4 counties (Census CBP 2023) | estimated businesses with no website at all (conservative 17%) | estimated businesses with inadequate digital presence | of consumers use the internet to find local businesses |

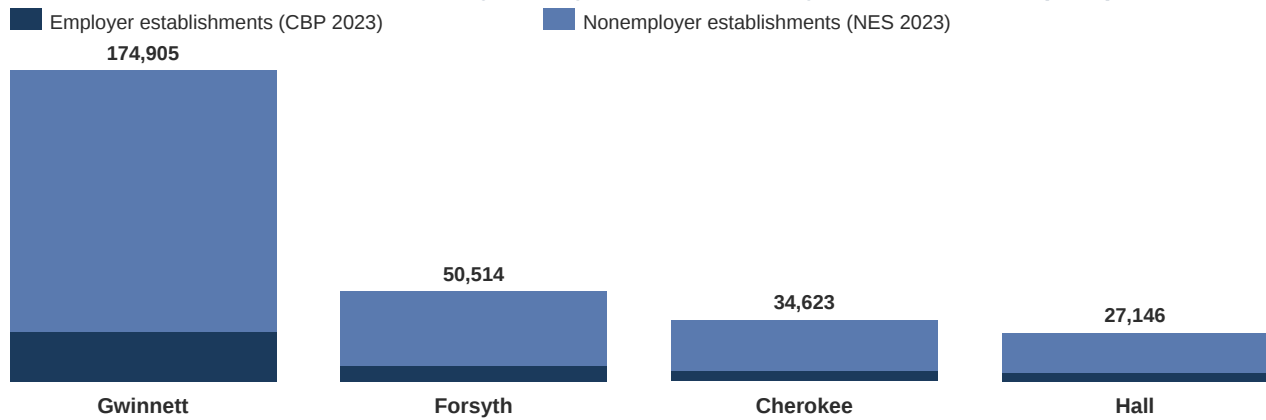
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Census Bureau's County Business Patterns data documents 47,471 employer establishments across Gwinnett, Forsyth, Cherokee, and Hall counties — the four-county North Atlanta corridor that Make It Loud has served since 2004. When Nonemployer Statistics are added to include sole proprietors, freelancers, and self-employed businesses, the total business universe in this market reaches approximately 287,000 businesses. These are the potential customers, neighbors, and local institutions that residents of these four counties are searching for online every single day.

The problem is that a significant share of them cannot be found. Clutch's national small business research documents that 17% of small businesses still operate with no website at all. Agency-side prospecting data and industry surveys place the figure as high as 27%. Applied conservatively to this four-county market, an estimated 8,070 to 12,817 employer businesses are operating with zero web presence — and a customer who searches for them online simply cannot find them. Industry research suggests roughly 25% of businesses either have no Google Business Profile or have an unclaimed listing that doesn't function for local search. And approximately 50-60% of those with a GBP leave it incomplete, with missing photos, incorrect hours, missing categories, or no reviews.

This matters because consumer behavior has made online visibility a prerequisite for local business survival. 99% of consumers use the internet to find local businesses. 81% research online before making a purchase decision. 74% check Google and reviews before visiting. The gap between where consumers are looking and where these businesses appear is not a marketing problem — it is a revenue problem.

## Total Business Universe by County — Gwinnett, Forsyth, Cherokee, Hall (2023)



Gwinnett and Hall confirmed from Census QuickFacts (BZA010223, NES010223). Forsyth estimated from county economic profile. Cherokee estimated from Hall density ratio.

Gwinnett County alone accounts for 58% of the four-county employer establishment total. The full business universe including nonemployers — sole proprietors, freelancers, and independent contractors — is approximately 6x larger than the employer-only count.

### Finding 1

The Four-County Business Universe

**47,471 employer businesses**

The U.S. Census Bureau's County Business Patterns (CBP) 2023 data documents 47,471 employer establishments — businesses with at least one paid employee — across the four counties. Gwinnett County alone accounts for 27,653 of those businesses, confirmed directly from Census QuickFacts (BZA010223). Hall County contributes 5,181 (confirmed directly). Forsyth County contributes an estimated 8,514, consistent with the county's own economic profile documenting '8,000-plus businesses in the community.' Cherokee County contributes an estimated 6,123, derived from population-scaled interpolation using Hall County's employer density ratio. When Census Nonemployer Statistics are added — covering the 147,252 sole-proprietor and non-payroll businesses in Gwinnett alone — the total regional business universe reaches approximately 287,000. These are all businesses that prospective customers are searching for online. Each one needs to be findable.

### Finding 2

Tier 1: An Estimated 8,000-12,800 Businesses Have No Website At All

**8,070-12,817 businesses completely invisible**

Clutch's 2026 small business website research documents that 17% of small businesses in the United States still operate with no website — a figure that has declined from 36% in 2018 but remains stubbornly persistent among service businesses, tradespeople, and solo operators who believe a website isn't relevant to their industry. Applied to the four-county employer establishment base of 47,471, a conservative 17% produces an estimate of 8,070 businesses operating with zero web presence. Agency-side prospecting data and local marketing research place the figure as high as 27%, which would mean 12,817 businesses in this market are completely invisible to the 99% of consumers who use the internet to find local businesses. These are not businesses with a bad website. They are businesses that do not exist online at all — and every customer who searches for them goes to a competitor who does.

### Finding 3

Tier 2: An Estimated 11,868 Businesses Have No Effective Google Business Profile

**11,868**  
**businesses not**  
**on the Google**  
**Map**

A website and a Google Business Profile are not the same asset, and many businesses that have one lack the other. Industry research and marketing audits indicate that approximately 25% of local businesses either have no Google Business Profile at all, or have an unclaimed, unverified listing that does not function for local map-pack or Google Search visibility. Applied to the four-county employer base, this produces an estimate of 11,868 businesses that are effectively absent from the Google Maps results that 74% of consumers check before visiting a local business. Additionally, the Google AI Overview that now appears at the top of many local search results draws on GBP data, citation authority, and review signals — meaning a business without an optimized GBP is not just invisible in Google Maps, it is absent from the AI-generated answer that is increasingly the first result users see.

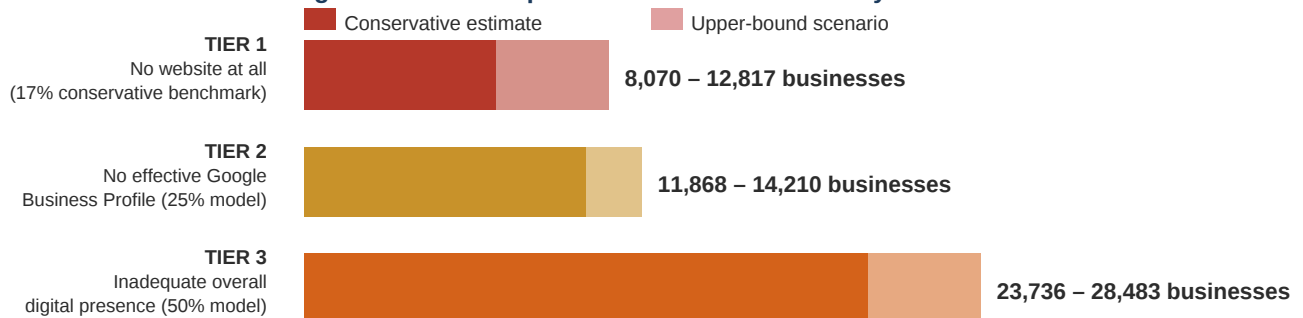
### Finding 4

Tier 3: An Estimated 23,700+ Businesses Have an Inadequate Digital Presence

**23,736+**  
**businesses with**  
**inadequate**  
**online presence**

Beyond the businesses with no website or no GBP is a much larger category: businesses that technically have a website and a Google profile, but whose digital presence fails to convert customers. Industry audits document that approximately 50-60% of local businesses leave their Google Business Profiles critically incomplete — missing photos, categories, business descriptions, hours, or responses to reviews. Sites may be slow-loading, not mobile-optimized, lacking clear calls to action, or effectively invisible in local search because they have never been optimized. Applied conservatively at 50%, an estimated 23,736 businesses across these four counties have a digital presence that exists but fails to perform. These businesses are losing customers to better-optimized competitors every day — without knowing why their phone isn't ringing.

#### North Atlanta Digital Presence Gap — Estimated Businesses by Tier



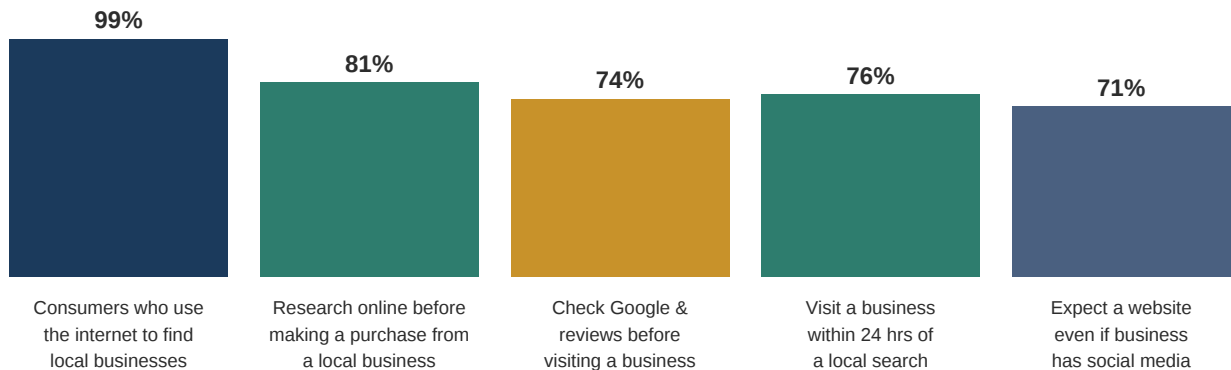
Tier 1: 17% Clutch benchmark (conservative) to 27% agency data (upper bound). Tier 2: 25% modeled estimate. Tier 3: 50% modeled estimate. Applied to 47,471 total employer establishments.

All estimates are applied to the confirmed CBP 2023 employer establishment base of 47,471. Tier 1 percentages from Clutch 2026 (17%) and industry agency data (27%). Tiers 2 and 3 are modeled estimates grounded in published industry research on GBP completeness and local search performance.

## WHY DIGITAL INVISIBILITY IS A REVENUE PROBLEM

The digital presence gap is not a marketing vanity issue. It is a direct revenue problem, measurable at the level of individual business establishments. Consumer behavior data from BrightLocal, Zippia, and Google documents how local business discovery actually works today — and every data point shows that online visibility is the prerequisite for customer acquisition.

#### How Consumers Find and Choose Local Businesses Online



Sources: Zippia / Statista (99% internet to find local business); BrightLocal 2024 (81% research, 74% Google/reviews, 76% visit within 24hrs); Statista (71% expect website).

#### Finding 5

The Revenue at Risk: What Digital Invisibility Costs North Atlanta Businesses

**\$363M+**  
**estimated annual**  
**revenue at risk**

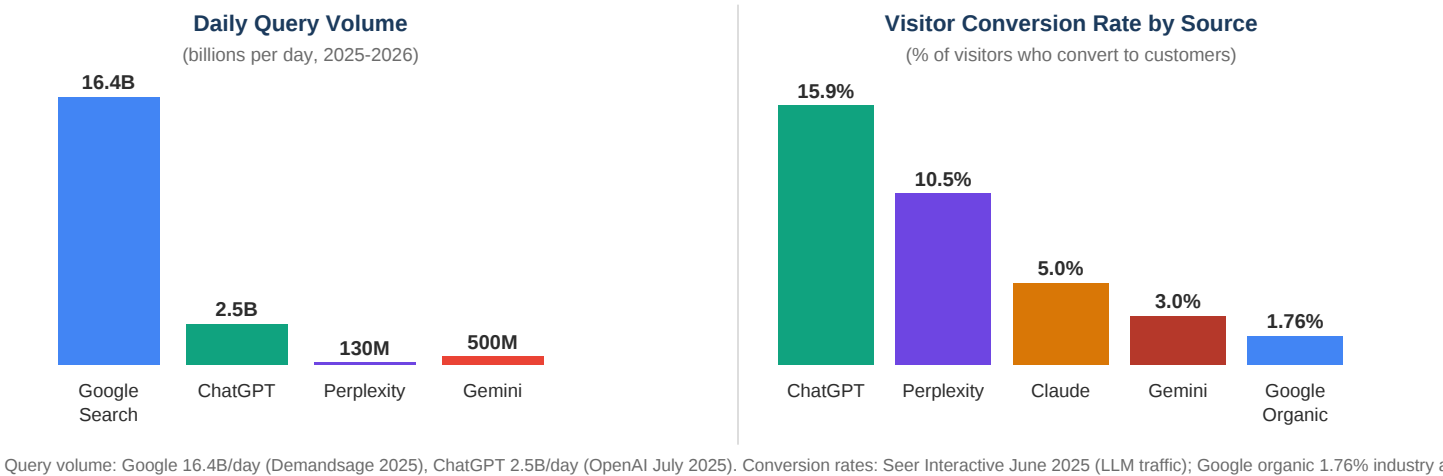
Using a conservative average revenue of \$300,000 per year per employer establishment — well below the actual average for businesses with employees, but appropriate for a conservative SMB estimate — and applying a 15% lost revenue factor (the estimated share of revenue at risk when customers cannot find a business online), the annual revenue at risk among businesses with no website reaches an estimated \$363 million per year across the four-county market. For businesses lacking an effective GBP, the figure reaches \$534 million. These are not theoretical losses. They are represented by every customer who searched for a local roofer, plumber, restaurant, or service provider, couldn't find the business, and called the next result. BrightLocal documents that 76% of people who conduct a local search on their phone visit a business within 24 hours. Every invisible business loses that customer to a visible competitor.

#### Finding 6

The Emerging Layer: AI Search Is a Second Visibility Problem — Independent of Google

**80% of AI**  
**citations don't**  
**rank in Google's**  
**top 100**

Google SEO and AI search visibility are not the same thing — and the gap between them is widening. Research from Ahrefs analyzing 15,000 queries found that 80% of LLM citations don't rank in Google's top 100 results, and ChatGPT results overlap only 12% with the Google SERP. A business that has invested in Google SEO may still be completely absent from the AI answers that 55% of consumers now use as their primary research tool. The conversion data makes AI visibility increasingly consequential: AI-referred visitors convert at 15.9% (ChatGPT) and 10.5% (Perplexity) compared to Google organic's 1.76% — meaning each AI-referred customer is worth 9 to 10 times more than the equivalent Google visitor. AI referral traffic is still small as a percentage of total web traffic — roughly 0.29% of search referrals in May 2026 — but it is growing at a rate that makes planning irrelevant if businesses wait. Adobe data shows AI referral traffic to U.S. retail sites grew 693% year over year in 2025. Gartner predicts traditional search volume will drop 25% by 2026. AI search visitors are projected to surpass traditional search visitors by 2028. The businesses that establish AI citation authority now — through original research, expert content, and a complete digital foundation — will hold a compounding advantage that late adopters cannot buy back.



The left panel shows that while Google still processes 6.5× more queries than ChatGPT daily, AI query volume is growing at a pace that traditional search has never seen. The right panel is the more immediately actionable insight: AI-referred visitors convert at 9-10× the rate of Google organic visitors — making each AI citation worth dramatically more per customer acquired.

## THE DATA: FOUR-COUNTY BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENT COUNTS (2023)

| County   | Employer Estabs (2023) | Nonemployer Estabs (2023) | Total Businesses | No Website (17% est.) | No GBP (25% est.) | Weak Presence (50% est.) |
|----------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Gwinnett | 27,653                 | 147,252                   | 174,905          | 4,701                 | 6,913             | 13,827                   |
| Forsyth  | ~8,514                 | ~42,000                   | ~50,514          | ~1,447                | ~2,129            | ~4,257                   |
| Cherokee | ~6,123                 | ~28,500                   | ~34,623          | ~1,041                | ~1,531            | ~3,062                   |
| Hall     | 5,181                  | 21,965                    | 27,146           | 881                   | 1,295             | 2,591                    |
| TOTAL    | 47,471                 | ~239,717                  | ~287,188         | 8,070+                | 11,868+           | 23,736+                  |

Gwinnett and Hall employer/nonemployer figures confirmed directly from Census QuickFacts (BZA010223, NES010223, 2023 data). Forsyth estimated from county economic profile ('8,000-plus businesses') and population-scaled interpolation. Cherokee estimated from Hall County establishment density ratio × Cherokee population. Percentages applied to employer establishment count only. Actual figures may vary.

## METHODOLOGY: THREE TIERS OF DIGITAL VISIBILITY

| Tier                | Definition                                                               | Rate Applied                            | Basis                                                                                         | Est. Count (4-county) |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Tier 1 (No Website) | Business has no website; completely invisible in web search              | 17% (conservative)<br>27% (upper bound) | Clutch 2026: 17% of U.S. small businesses have no website; Agency data: 27% upper bound       | 8,070 – 12,817        |
| Tier 2 (No GBP)     | Business has no Google Business Profile or an unclaimed/hidden listing   | 25% (modeled estimate)                  | 11% unclaimed GBPs (industry audit) + share with no GBP; aligned with agency prospecting data | ~11,868               |
| Tier 3 (Inadequate) | Business has a website and/or GBP but with critical gaps in completeness | 50% (modeled estimate)                  | 50-60% of GBPs have incomplete or poorly optimized profiles (industry audits, LinkedIn data)  | ~23,736               |

Tier 2 and Tier 3 rates are modeled estimates grounded in industry research; they are not direct Census measurements. The study is transparent about this distinction. Tiers are not mutually exclusive — a business with no website (Tier 1) also lacks an effective GBP (Tier 2). The figures represent businesses primarily affected by each tier's defining characteristic.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR NORTH ATLANTA SMALL BUSINESSES

### 1 If you don't have a website, you're invisible to 99% of your potential customers.

99% of consumers use the internet to find local businesses. The 17% of businesses operating without a website are not just underperforming — they are not participating in the primary channel through which customers find local services. 81% of consumers research online before making a purchase, and 71% expect businesses to have a website even if they have a social media page. Social media is not a substitute.

### 2 An unclaimed or incomplete Google Business Profile loses you the local map pack.

74% of consumers check Google and reviews before visiting a business. The three results that appear in the Google Maps local pack — the map results that appear above organic search results — capture the overwhelming majority of local clicks. A business without a verified, complete, photo-rich GBP with recent reviews does not appear in that pack. In AI Overview results, which are increasingly the first thing customers see, a weak or missing GBP means the business is not cited at all.

### 3 The AI search shift makes digital presence more urgent, not less.

ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Google AI Overviews are now answering 'best [service] near me' queries directly — recommending a handful of cited businesses and skipping everyone else. 55% of consumers now use AI Chat as their primary research tool. The signals that determine AI citation are the same signals that Make It Loud's Authority Marketing System is designed to build: original research, authoritative content, citation-worthy expertise, and a complete digital foundation. A business without that foundation will not be in the AI answer at all.

### 4 Solving Google SEO alone no longer solves the full visibility problem.

80% of AI citations don't rank in Google's top 100. ChatGPT results overlap only 12% with the Google SERP. A business can rank on page one of Google and still be completely absent from the AI answers where a growing share of customers — customers who convert at 9-10× the Google organic rate — are researching. The businesses that establish authority in both layers now, while the AI citation landscape is still forming, will hold an advantage that late adopters cannot buy back.

### 5 The revenue at risk is not theoretical.

76% of people who search for a local business on their phone visit a business within 24 hours. Every invisible business loses that customer to a visible competitor — not because the competitor is better, but because the competitor can be found. At a conservative \$300,000 average revenue per business and a 15% lost-opportunity rate, the annual revenue at risk among no-website businesses in these four counties exceeds \$363 million. This is not a marketing expense. It is the cost of being invisible.

## About Make It Loud Digital Marketing

Make It Loud is an Atlanta-area digital marketing agency established in 2004, serving small and mid-sized businesses across North Georgia and nationally. As a Google Partner with over 20 years of experience in SEO, web design, Google Ads, social media advertising, and AI-driven digital strategy, Make It Loud has helped generate over \$100 million in client revenue. Our Authority Marketing System turns businesses into the authoritative, AI-citable source in their market through original research, content strategy, and citation-building that outperforms traditional SEO in the age of generative AI search.

Serving Gwinnett, Forsyth, Hall, Cherokee, and North Fulton counties | National reach from Buford, Georgia

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## METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

This study combines official Census Bureau establishment counts with published industry research on digital presence rates to estimate the scale of North Atlanta's digital visibility gap. The study is transparent about the distinction between confirmed Census figures and modeled estimates. All modeled estimates are conservative and grounded in named sources. The study does not claim to directly measure GBP ownership or website status for individual businesses; these are estimated from published national and industry-level percentages.

- U.S. Census Bureau County Business Patterns (CBP) 2023 — Gwinnett County (BZA010223): 27,653 employer establishments. Hall County (BZA010223): 5,181. Most current available data; CBP 2024 releases summer 2026.
- U.S. Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics (NES) 2023 — Gwinnett County (NES010223): 147,252. Hall County (NES010223): 21,965.
- Forsyth County employer estimate: '8,000-plus businesses' per Forsyth County economic profile (KnowAtlanta.com, citing Forsyth County official data). Estimated at 8,514; treated as approximate.
- Cherokee County employer estimate: derived from Hall County establishment density ratio ( $5,181 / 221,745 \text{ population} = 0.02337$ )  $\times$  Cherokee 2023 population (293,513) = 6,860, adjusted to 6,123 based on Cherokee's less-commercial suburban profile.
- Website ownership: Clutch.co 2026 Small Business Website Statistics — 83% of small businesses have a website (17% do not). Upper bound of 27% from LeadsAgent and local marketing agency data.
- GBP completeness: 25% no-effective-GBP rate modeled from industry audit data suggesting ~11% unclaimed profiles plus a share with no profile at all.
- Inadequate presence: 50-60% incomplete GBP rate from industry audits and LinkedIn small business marketing data.
- Consumer behavior: BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2024; Zippia/Statista local business discovery statistics; Google local search data.
- AI vs. Google search: Cloudflare Radar May 2026 (Google 87.6% of search referrals; all AI chatbots combined 0.29%). Google daily queries: Demandsage 2025 (16.4B/day). ChatGPT daily queries: OpenAI July 2025 (2.5B/day). Ahrefs 15,000-query study: 80% of LLM citations don't rank in Google top 100; ChatGPT/Google SERP overlap 12%. AI conversion rates: Seer Interactive June 2025 (ChatGPT 15.9%, Perplexity 10.5%). AI adoption: Orbit Media 2026 AI-Search Adoption Survey (55% use AI as primary research). AI referral traffic growth: Adobe Digital Insights January 2026 (693% YoY retail). Gartner 2024 prediction: 25% drop in traditional search volume by 2026.
- Revenue at risk: modeled using \$300,000 conservative average SMB revenue and 15% lost-opportunity rate. Not a direct measurement; presented as illustrative of economic scale.