

The Five Searches

What a board, a client or a search committee finds when they look you up — and how to see it for yourself tonight. Two minutes, and you need nothing but a browser.

Before you start

Do not search your own name first. The system will find you if it is told exactly who to look for, and you will come away reassured for no good reason. Start with search 01 — the search someone runs *before* they know your name exists. That is the only one that matters.

Run these in any AI tool — ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini or Claude — and **use at least two**. They draw on different sources and disagree more than people expect. Use a fresh chat, signed out or in a private window: a tool that already knows you is not running the search a stranger runs.

FILL THESE IN FIRST

Your field, as a
client says it

Your market or
region

Your city

Subject you'd be
quoted on

THE FIVE SEARCHES

01 Your own category

"Who are the leading voices on [your field] in [your market]?"

What it tests: whether you exist at all in the answer a stranger receives. Does your name appear? Do you recognize the names that do — and are they ahead of you, or simply better documented?

02 Your own position

"What does [your name] believe about [your subject]?"

What it tests: whether you hold a position or merely a location. Most senior leaders come back with a job title and a company description — which is to say, with nothing. A title says where you are, not what you think.

03 What your clients type

"Best [your specialty] in [your city]"

What it tests: the exact search your clients, patients and partners run. Who comes back instead of you — and how long have they actually been doing this?

04 Whether you get recommended

"If I needed the best [your field] advisor in [your market], who should I call?"

What it tests: search 01 asks whether you can be listed. This asks whether you can be **recommended** — a far higher bar, and the one a real referral runs on. Being mentioned and being suggested are not the same event.

05 Whether anything is citable

"What has [your name] published or written about [your subject]?"

What it tests: the search that most reliably comes back empty. A system can only quote what exists in a form it can point to. This one shows you whether anything does.

HOW TO READ WHAT COMES BACK

Results land in four shapes. In descending order of how often we see them — and only one of the four is good.

ABSENT

Nothing returns, or the answer is complete without you. The most common outcome by a distance, and the most misread. This is not a ranking problem you can climb. The system is not weighing you and placing you low — it has nothing to weigh.

THIN

A title, an employer, perhaps a conference photograph. You exist as a location rather than a position. A reader learns where you work and nothing about what you think, which is the specific thing a board is trying to find out.

WRONG

Invented detail, or a merge with someone who shares your name. Worse than absence, because it is stated with complete confidence and nobody thinks to check it. We find this more often than anyone expects, and it is the result people find hardest to look at.

DATED

A role you left, a firm that changed, a view you have moved past. The record froze at the last moment somebody else wrote about you. It keeps working — just on behalf of a version of you that no longer exists.

WHY TWENTY YEARS DOES NOT SHOW UP

If the results seemed unrelated to the amount of work you have actually done, there is a mechanical reason. **Not all evidence of you is worth the same.**

A social post is not a source — it disappears in days and nothing indexes it as authority. A company bio is a weak one; it is you describing yourself, and every system reading it knows that. A bylined article is better, because somebody else chose to publish you. A book with an ISBN, sitting in library catalogs and distribution systems, is a strong source: permanent, verifiable, independent of you. And someone else citing you is the strongest there is, precisely because you did not write it.

Most senior people are working hard at the top of that list and have nothing at the bottom of it. Then they wonder why the effort does not compound. It is not a visibility problem. It is a record problem, and the two need completely different work.

If you saw any of the four, the useful question is not how to rank higher.

It is *what would have to exist for the answer to be different* — and that is a question about what you have published, not about what you have posted.

Running this by hand tells you something is wrong. It does not tell you what, or how much, or what closing it would take. The full evaluation measures it properly: your Authority Quotient across five dimensions, verified against reality, with your gap map — and the working architecture of the book and communication strategy that would close it.

What we will not claim. Nobody can promise that any AI system will cite you. Those systems are opaque and change without notice, and anyone telling you otherwise is selling something they cannot deliver. What can be built is the record they draw from. Everything else follows from that, or does not happen at all.

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