



# Why AI Recommends Some Podiatrists and Not Others

Is your practice's message being clearly understood?

BY SHAUN ZAKEN

For years, patients found podiatrists by searching online, comparing websites, and reading reviews before making a call. Of course, that still happens, but it's no longer the only path. Increasingly, patients are relying on AI chatbots and AI generated summaries from Google and other search engines to answer questions and guide decisions directly within search results, often without ever clicking through to a website.

And this shift is happening faster than most practices realize. Nearly 60 percent of adults in the United States say they refer to AI-generated summaries when conducting online searches, and roughly 10 percent rely on those summaries without scrolling further (*Morning Consult*, 2025). For perspective, ChatGPT entered the mainstream in late 2022! So in just a few years, AI has already begun shaping how patients decide which providers to consider, and that influence continues to grow.

For many patients, AI summaries no longer feel experimental; they feel efficient. Which means instead of serving as a starting point for research, they're increasingly functioning as the decision point itself. That change alone reshapes how visibility works online and raises an important question for podiatrists trying to stay competitive.

**Why does AI recommend some practices and not others? And more to the point, why might it be overlooking mine?**

In most cases, the answer is reassuring. AI isn't choosing favorites

at random; it's responding to signals. Specifically, signals of trust, clarity, relevance, and consistency. Now, these ideas may sound like marketing jargon at first, but they mirror the same qualities patients have always relied on when choosing a healthcare provider. The difference now is that AI is interpreting those signals at scale.

Let's do a deeper dive into these four main signals:

**Trust** is built through proof, including patient reviews that describe real outcomes, DPM and practice cre-

lines signals that your practice is a good match for someone's current search.

**Consistency** reinforces everything else. When your website, reviews, business listings, and ongoing activity all tell the same story over time, AI gains confidence. Mixed messages or outdated information, on the other hand, introduce doubt. Together, these signals help AI determine not just whether your practice exists, but whether it can recommend it with confidence.

Think about your own behavior as a consumer. You return to the same

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dentials that are clearly explained, and online content that demonstrates experience with specific conditions. AI looks for evidence that patients have had credible, positive experiences with your practice over time.

**Clarity** comes from specificity. So, practices that clearly explain what they treat, how they treat it, and who they help are easier for AI to understand. Therefore, condition-specific landing pages (not one page with a list of every foot and ankle condition!), straightforward language, and fewer assumptions reduce ambiguity and increase confidence.

**Relevance** reflects alignment with patient intent. Content that answers common questions about symptoms, treatment options, and recovery time-

search engine or AI platform because it works. You're satisfied. But when that trust erodes, you look elsewhere. That same logic now applies to how search engines evaluate medical practices. Clear signals make decisions easier, for AI and for patients alike.

## AI Recommendation Is Becoming the First Impression

AI summaries now appear prominently alongside traditional search results, and often before a patient ever clicks on a website. When those summaries feel clear and complete, many patients stop there. In practical terms, the AI response itself is increasingly shaping a patient's first impression of a provider, sometimes before a practice's website is even seen.

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When someone asks a question like, “Who should I see for heel pain near me,” AI pulls information from across the web and looks for patterns it can confidently interpret. It isn’t evaluating bedside manner or clinical skill. It’s evaluating clarity, relevance, and focus. This is where structure and specificity begin to matter in a very real way.

A practice with a dedicated heel pain page on its website, supported by related blog content and clear treatment explanations gives AI a concentrated signal to work with. It tells AI not only that heel pain is treated, but that it’s treated regularly and with intention. By contrast, a practice that mentions heel pain only as part of a long list of conditions provides far less context. From the perspective of both AI and patients, one practice appears focused while the other appears general, and that distinction often determines who is recommended first.

### **Insider Tip**

AI recommendations are driven by confidence of interpretation, not popularity. So clear, conversational copy that mirrors how patients actually search makes it easier for AI to understand what your practice does well. Simple FAQ sections throughout your website that represent real patient questions often outperform clever marketing language.

### **Why Reviews Matter More Than Ever**

Much of a practice’s online presence is created internally (based on your content, often with the help of an agency partner), but reviews are different. They’re generated entirely by patients, which makes them especially valuable as trust signals. Star ratings still matter, but AI places greater emphasis on consistency, language, and context. A simple five-star rating from many months ago offers limited insight. A steady flow of recent reviews that mention pain relief, recovery, or clear communication, however, tells a far more useful story.

Over time, patterns in review language help AI understand what your

practice is known for and why patients trust it. That understanding directly influences which searches your practice appears in and which patients are more likely to consider calling.

### **Insider Tip**

Instead of asking patients to rate you five stars, ask them to share what they enjoyed about their experience, or how their condition im-

proved under your care. Specific experiences carry far more weight than generic praise.

### **Clarity Builds Trust for AI (and for Patients)**

Reviews are important, but they aren’t enough on their own. AI also evaluates how a practice communicates on its own platforms. And just like vague reviews, vague language can create problems. Claims such as “comprehensive foot care” may sound reassuring, but in truth, they tell AI very little. Instead, statements like “we treat sports related foot injuries every day” are easier to interpret and connect to patient intent.

Notably, the questions AI prioritizes are often the same ones patients ask in the exam room: *When should I see a podiatrist? What treatment options are available? How long will recovery take?* When those questions are answered clearly online, AI gains confidence in recommending the practice. Patients benefit as well because they arrive more informed, more comfortable, and better aligned with the care you provide.

### **Credentials Still Matter, but Context Matters More**

Board certification, years in practice, and areas of focus remain important trust signals and AI still uses them to establish authority. Credentials, however, are most effective when they’re paired with context. So, explaining how experience applies to

### **Activity Signals Reassurance**

Another signal AI considers is whether a practice appears current and engaged. (Newer, smaller practic-

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## **Podiatrists who already focus on patient experience, clear communication, and credibility are well aligned with what AI values.**

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es take note: this is one of the easiest ways to level the playing field in a competitive market today). Not long ago, legacy practices with long-standing (albeit outdated) content on their websites would dominate every search based on history alone. Not anymore. Instead, practices that publish original content, regularly update profiles, and remain active online can send stronger signals of relevance to improve their visibility. In other words, set it and forget it no longer applies. Updated photos, accurate office hours, consistent posts, and refreshed content signal attentiveness. AI tends to favor practices that appear maintained rather than static.

### **Insider Tip**

Consistency matters more than frequency. Modest, regular updates outperform occasional bursts, so consider creating a simple content calendar to schedule relevant updates throughout the year.

### **An Often-Overlooked Benefit: Better Fit Patients**

Clear AI visibility does more than increase exposure. It improves patient quality. When AI accurately reflects what your practice treats and how you provide care, patients arrive with more appropriate expectations. They’re more likely to be seeking the services you actually offer, which leads to better alignment and more productive initial visits. Win-win!

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In that sense, AI visibility isn't just about being found; it's about being found by the right patients.

### **Why Similar Practices Receive Different AI Recommendations**

It's common for two nearby practices with similar skill profiles to experience very different levels of AI visibility, and the difference is rarely clinical expertise. More often, it's communication. One practice clearly explains what it treats, who it helps, and what patients can expect. The other relies on generic descriptions or outdated information. Keep in mind, AI can only recommend what it can confidently interpret.

### **What Podiatrists Can Do In-House**

This can all feel overwhelming, but many of the strongest recommendation signals are already within your control. Evaluate whether your web-

site's copy is clear and focused. Keep Google Business Profiles accurate and current. Encourage thoughtful patient reviews. Clearly explain conditions and treatments online. Periodically review how AI presents your practice. Taken together, these steps help AI form a clearer, more confident understanding of your practice.

### **When Outside Guidance Can Help**

For busy practices, however, maintaining consistency across platforms and keeping pace with how AI search evolves can be challenging. In those cases, outside support can help monitor trends, refine messaging, and maintain alignment. Whether handled internally or with support, the objective remains the same: make it easy for AI to recommend your practice with confidence, and your practice will be considered by more patients online.

### **A Practical Perspective**

AI isn't replacing relationships,

referrals, or clinical excellence; it's reflecting them. Podiatrists who already focus on patient experience, clear communication, and credibility are well aligned with what AI values. When someone in your community searches for a podiatrist, AI will help guide the decision. The question is whether it has enough clarity to recommend your practice. **PM**



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