



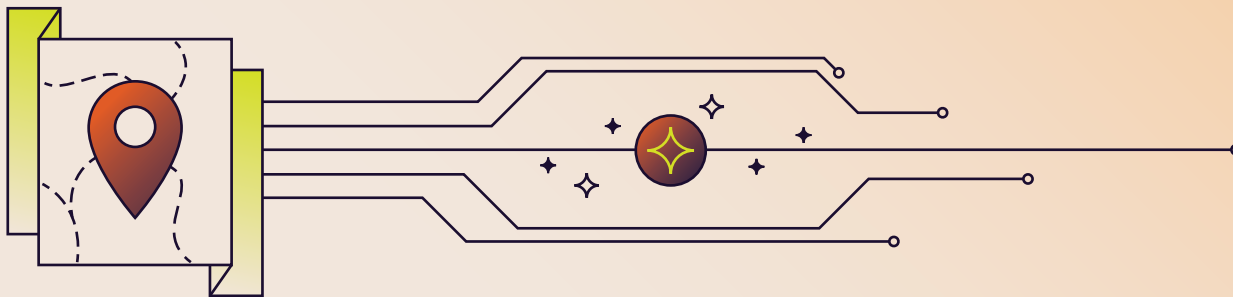
DEALER SPIKE

HIGH PERFORMANCE SERIES • PLAYBOOK 1

How AI Rewired Where—and When— Your Buyers Look

AI didn't just add a new search box. It changed the map your buyers follow and the hours they follow it. Here's what that means for your dealership's visibility.





AI Changed the Map, Not Just the Search Bar

Most dealers think of AI search as one more place to show up—a new box next to Google. It's bigger than that. AI changed the entire path your buyers take to a purchase: where they go for answers, how many stops they make, and what time of day they make them.

If your visibility strategy still assumes a buyer searches, clicks your site, and calls during business hours, it's built for a map your buyers no longer follow.

Two shifts matter most for your dealership, and the rest of this eBook is about both: AI changed **where** your buyers look, and it changed **when**. Miss either, and you're invisible until the decision is forming.

For more than half the searches your buyers run, the first thing they see isn't a list of dealers. It's an AI-generated answer that names a few stores it decides to trust—and then sends the buyer off to verify.

66

AI-generated answers are appearing at the top of the search page in place of those first links. We're seeing a rise in what's called **zero-click behavior**—Google gives such a robust answer that for a lot of queries, there's no click-through to a website at all."

LANCE SHROYER

Director of SEO, Dealer Spike



That first impression carries weight even though it rarely takes the click. On average, only 0.1% of AI Overview searches result in a click straight from the overview.¹ Shoppers read the summary, then click through to a website from the search results below. While the overview isn't a traffic source, it's the frame around the results page: it shapes who shoppers see as credible, and that strongly influences which website result earns the click.

1. Dealer Spike internal website traffic data.

Where: AI Turned One Search into a Dozen Stops

The old path was a funnel: search, click, call, close. AI helped turn it into a loop.



They're not failing to convert. They're circling, which is why on most dealer sites, page views vastly outpace leads.

Here's what that means for where you need to be found. AI rarely ends the search; it starts a verification loop across surfaces you don't control, like a sales floor. So being "in the AI answer" only matters if you're also consistent everywhere the buyer goes next:

- ◆ **The AI Answer Itself:** The first stop, where a few trusted dealers get named, and the rest get skipped.
- ◆ **The Map Pack:** Where "dealer near me" turns into a drive-over, decided by your Google Business Profile.
- ◆ **Your Reviews:** The trust check the buyer (and the AI) runs before committing.
- ◆ **Your Listings:** Where a missing price or thin photos ends the loop on the spot.

When these tell the same complete, accurate story, the buyer's confidence compounds at every stop, and so does the trust the algorithms place in you. When one contradicts another, the whole picture reads as unreliable, and the buyer moves on.

Go Deeper: Make Your Site AI-Ready

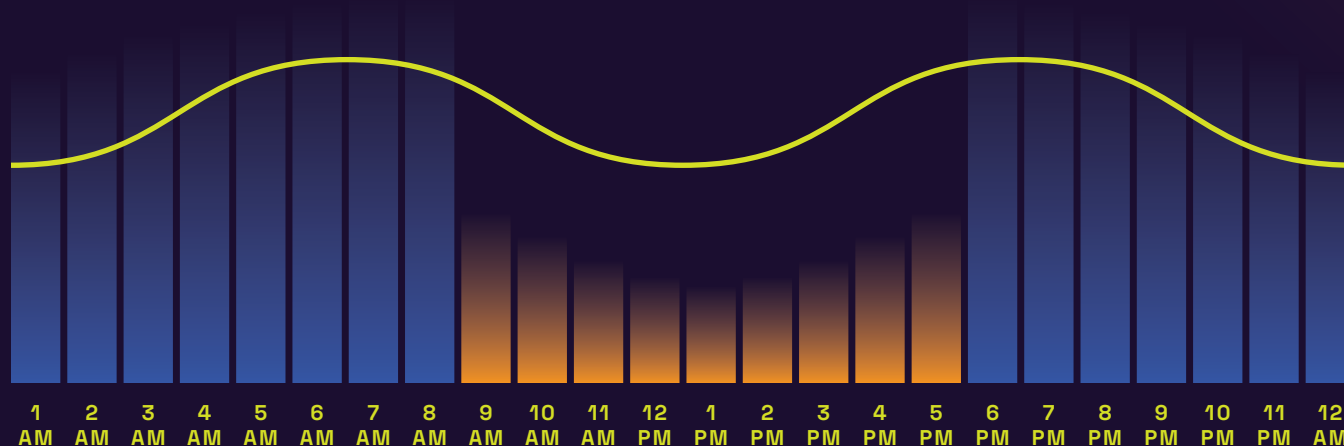
This eBook is about how AI changed where and when your buyers look. For the hands-on playbook on making your listings, schema, and reviews the kind of thing AI recommends—and how the buyer journey plays out inside AI search—see our companion guide, *How Dealers Can Compete & Win in the Age of AI*.

[Read the AI Companion Guide](#)

When: AI Moved the Decision to After Hours

The second shift is timing. AI gives instant answers at any hour, so the research that used to wait for a phone call now happens whenever the buyer has a free minute—lunch break, kids in bed, the couch at 9:47 p.m. The decision-making process has moved to the exact hours your store is dark.

54% of dealer website traffic lands outside standard business hours³



This is why AI raises the stakes on your always-on surfaces. When a buyer asks an AI a question at 10 p.m., no one from your team is there to answer—your listing, your profile, and your reviews answer for you.

If they're complete and consistent, you stay running while you sleep. If they're not, the buyer gets their answer from a competitor whose surfaces were ready.

AI didn't just change where buyers look; it made your after-hours presence the version of your store most buyers meet first.

² *The State of the Dealer: 2026.*

What Earns the Answer at Every Hour

Being named by AI and chosen by buyers comes down to the same signals, because AI reads the web the way a careful buyer would, just in less than a second.

Two signals carry outsized weight. First, reviews are a threshold, not a vanity metric. Below a certain bar, you don't get to compete; you get filtered out before the conversation starts—by buyers and by the AI weighing which sources to trust.



“

Reputation and reviews carry just as much weight [as location].

If I see a dealer with great reviews, I'll happily drive a little farther to buy from them instead of the closest one.”

RONNIE COULAM

Director of Sales, Dealer Spike



And the content matters as much as the score: a review naming a specific brand, model, or staff member gives both buyers and AI something concrete to trust. That's why reputation behaves like a turnover lever rather than a soft metric.

+14% higher inventory turnover for dealers running a reputation management strategy³

4x more leads and **54%** faster inventory turnover for the top 10% of dealers compared to the average³

Second, consistency compounds. Every accurate, complete surface makes the next one more believable to buyers and algorithms alike. That compounding is exactly why the gap between average and elite dealers is so wide—and it isn't about spending more.

3. *The State of the Dealer: 2026.*

What This Means for Your Dealership

Here's the good news buried in all this change:
none of it requires chasing the newest tactic.

AI rewired where and when buyers look, but what earns their attention at every stop is the same thing it always was: a store whose listings, profile, and reviews are complete, accurate, and consistent everywhere a buyer, or an AI, checks.

That's harder than it sounds, because it means keeping a lot of surfaces true at once, around the clock. But it's the problem worth solving first because it lies beneath everything else you do to grow. A store that's easy to find and easy to trust is the one AI keeps surfacing, and buyers keep short-listing—while you sleep, and while the competition is still relying on business hours.

Win the Buyer While Your Doors Are Locked

AI didn't replace search—it rewired the journey around it. Your buyers now start with an answer instead of a link, verify it across a dozen surfaces you don't staff, and do most of it after your doors are locked. The stores that win that journey aren't the ones spending the most. They're the ones that show up complete and consistent everywhere AI might send a buyer, at every hour a buyer might look—so they stay on the short list long before anyone's ready to talk. The first step is simply seeing the loop clearly. From there, every other move you make to grow gets easier.



About Dealer Spike

For nearly 20 years, Dealer Spike has been the digital partner built specifically for dealerships.

We serve 6,800+ dealers across North America in powersports, marine, trailer, agriculture, heavy truck, heavy equipment, and outdoor power equipment, partnering with 200+ OEMs and driving more than 3.1 million units sold through our platforms.

We put our promises in writing: 24-hour support resolution, 99.97% uptime, and a minimum 30% increase in leads, guaranteed. From high-performance websites and inventory management to AI-driven marketing and discoverability built for how buyers search today, we make selling inventory easier and faster.

From first click to customer for life, Dealer Spike has one job: **help you sell more stuff, faster.**

DealerSpike.com

