The 43 Percent Problem: Nearly Half of Page-One PI Firms Tell Google They Are the Wrong Kind of Business



43 percent of the 1,005 page-one personal injury firms I audited sit under the wrong primary Google Business category. It is the single strangest number in a year of measuring this industry, and the cheapest fix in legal marketing. This piece explains what the number means, why it happens, why it matters more in the AI era, and the two-minute check every firm owner should run today.

What I measured

The study behind this number audited the Google Business Profiles of 1,005 US personal injury law firms, every one of them ranking on Google page one, across a nine-attribute framework: category, hours, reviews, photos, and the rest of the fields Google exposes. One profile at a time, hand-checked, over weeks.

The headline findings, in order of how much they should change your behavior:

95.9 percent of firms have a profile. Presence is solved.

Mean completeness was 7.05 out of 9. Filling in fields is solved too. Almost everyone does it. Completeness showed almost no correlation with rank. The thing agencies report as progress differentiates nobody, because everybody has it.
And 43 percent sat under the wrong primary category. The one field that carries the most relevance signal is the one nearly half the winners got wrong.

How a law firm ends up in the wrong category

Nobody chooses the wrong category on purpose. It happens in three mundane ways.
A vendor set up the profile years ago, picked something generic, and left. The firm inherited the setting and nobody has looked at it since, because nothing looks broken.
Or the firm chose a broad category deliberately, reasoning that wider must mean more visibility. The opposite is true: the category is not a net you widen, it is a declaration you sharpen. Generic tells Google you are generically relevant, which in the most competitive vertical in search means relevant to nothing in particular.
Or an office was added, a profile was merged, a suggestion was auto-accepted, and the setting drifted. Profiles are living records that other people can propose edits to. Unwatched, they drift.

Why the machines care so much about one field

The mechanism is documented, not speculative. Google holds a patent on categorization of search results, US 8498984, and the local stack leans on category signals to decide which businesses even enter consideration for a query. The primary category is the strongest single statement of what you are.
It also does not work alone. The machine cross-checks: does the category match what the website's structured data declares? What the practice pages say? What the directories repeat? Google patented corroborating facts across multiple sources, US 8682913, more than a decade ago. When your profile says one thing and your site says another, or says nothing, confidence drops, and confidence is what gets a firm into the map pack and into AI answers.
That is what makes the 43 percent finding worse than it first sounds: in my companion audit of the same firms' websites, only 35.3 percent declared themselves a legal service in machine-readable form at all. For a huge share of the market, the two witnesses either disagree or one never testifies.

The AI-era multiplier

Category errors used to cost map rankings. They now cost more, because the answer layer inherited the same entity plumbing.
When someone asks an AI tool for the best truck accident lawyer in their city, the model is not reading your homepage with fresh eyes. It leans on the accumulated, corroborated record of what your firm is. A firm whose category, schema, and pages all agree is a resolvable entity a machine can safely name. A firm with a misdeclared category and a silent website is a guess, and machines do not stake answers on guesses.

In my 2026 SERP Authority Report, only 11.1 percent of the citations inside AI search features on personal injury queries were even on-topic. The answer layer is starving for firms it can confidently cite. Misdeclaring your own business type is volunteering to be uncitable.

The two-minute check, and the honest caveat

The check: open Google Business, look at your primary primary category, and ask one question. Is this the exact category for what we most want to be found for, or is it an approximation somebody chose in 2019?

Then check the corroboration: does your website's structured data say the same thing? Do your practice pages? If you do not know whether your site declares anything at all, you are statistically likely to be in the two-thirds that do not.

The honest caveat, because I publish data rather than folklore: fixing a category is not a magic ranking lever. 43 percent of winners have it wrong and still rank, carried by everything else. The point is not that the category alone decides your fate. The point is that it is a silent handicap, it costs two minutes to remove, and in a market where nearly half your competitors carry the same handicap unknowingly, the firms that remove it compete cleanly while the rest pay agencies to fight uphill.

The wider lesson

The 43 percent problem is really a governance problem wearing a technical costume. It persists because it lives in the gap between vendors: the agency optimizes content, the profile was set up by someone gone, the website schema belongs to nobody, and no dashboard anywhere flags that the three disagree about what the firm is.

Someone at your firm should own the answer to one question: what does the machine record say we are, everywhere it speaks? In my experience the first time anyone asks it, they find the 43 percent problem, or one of its cousins.

My free PI Authority Scorecard makes that first ask systematic: 16 questions, 90 seconds, scored across the four pillars including exactly this authority layer, with a two-page PDF and an 8-minute Loom from me. behzadhussain.me

The full nine-attribute study is free on my research page: behzadhussain.me. Check my counting, then check your category. In that order if you like, but check the category today.

About the Author

Behzad Hussain — Personal Injury SEO Strategist. Behzad Hussain is a Personal Injury SEO Strategist, independent researcher, founder and CEO of Rank Brilliance, and creator of the Personal Injury Organic Authority Engine. He helps competitive personal injury law firms build organic case acquisition systems through technical SEO, Semantic SEO, structured data, topical authority, and entity reinforcement.