

Digital Marketing Trends For Hair Salons 2026

IS AI TAKING OVER FROM GOOGLE SEARCH?



A Comprehensive Study Into The Behaviour of 4.6 Million Salon Website Visitors

In this study of 200+ salon websites, Salon Guru examines user behaviour and booking journeys of 4.6 million website visitors who viewed 8.3 million web pages over a 12-month period to August 2026.

This report is intentionally challenging. It is designed to help salon owners focus on the activities that are most likely to generate measurable bookings and revenue growth.

Salon Guru Managing Director Phil Evans explains:

"The industry needs an honest conversation about what is actually generating bookings."

"If I owned a salon and had only five hours a week to spend on marketing, I would invest them in improving Google & AI visibility, collecting reviews, refining service pages and making the booking journey effortless."

"The salons that grow over the next five years will not be the ones with the prettiest social feeds. They will be the ones that are the easiest to find on AI & Google search. And they will put their team, work and reviews centre stage on their website."

AI Is Changing How Clients Search

In 2026, salon marketing is moving from “being found on Google” to “being recommended by search engines and AI.”

ChatGPT remains by far the most popular AI assistant and industry analysts suggest that **up to 58% of the UK and US population** now use AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, or AI search overviews to search for businesses and services.

Clients are increasingly asking AI to recommend which salon they should use. They are also asking detailed questions and chatting with AI assistants about services and salons.



When using a straightforward Google search, clients tend to type in “hair colour salon near me” — whereas they will ask AI more detailed questions such as “What’s the best salon near me for balayage for naturally dark hair?”

The expectation is that AI agents will handle requests like: “Find me a balayage appointment next Thursday after 5pm with someone highly rated for colour correction.”

That changes what a salon needs to optimise on their website — and there are 5 areas you need to consider to be seen by Google and AI tools:

Visibility + Authority + Proof + Relevance + Conversion

Put simply, salons must now provide trusted information on their websites and Google Business Profiles, including reviews, real hair images, recent five-star reviews, detailed stylist profiles, useful service content, and quick and easy booking links. Clients don’t need more content — they need faster answers.

Why AI Loves Reviews

Reviews are one of the best ways for a salon to build instant trust — particularly when they reflect genuine customer experiences.

Generic reviews are good — “Great salon, lovely staff” — but a client who writes “Sarah did an amazing job correcting my brassy blonde colour...” helps provide useful information about what the salon is known for.

For an AI-powered search experience, this kind of information is potentially much more useful when determining what a business is known for.

AI systems increasingly need to establish questions such as:

- Which salon specialises in balayage?
- Who is experienced with colour correction?
- Which salons are recommended for curly hair?
- Which stylist is highly rated by clients?

This is why salons should actively encourage genuine, detailed reviews rather than simply asking every client to “leave us a review”.

Make sure you ask clients to leave detailed and genuine reviews to your Google Business Profile and it is vitally important to answer every single review received.

Is AI Content Worth Using?

There is no doubt that AI is making it easier for salons to create website content. A salon can now use AI to produce a blog about balayage, write a page about hair extensions or generate a list of haircare tips in seconds.

But this creates a problem. If every salon uses AI to produce the same generic content, that content becomes increasingly worthless. The value comes from using AI as a tool to communicate your own expertise, rather than allowing it to replace it.

Instead of publishing another generic article about “10 Tips for Blonde Hair”, a salon could explain:

- How its colourists approach damaged blonde hair
- A real client's journey from dark hair to blonde
- Which products the salon recommends for blondes and why
- Real examples of transformations carried out in the salon

This is where first-hand experience becomes increasingly valuable. Use real stylists. Real clients. Real transformations. Real photographs. Real videos. Real reviews. Real expertise. Real local knowledge.

AI can help you structure and communicate this information, but the underlying information should come from your salon.

Social Media Attracts Attention — Search Captures Intention

For years, the salon industry has operated on a widely accepted assumption: “If your social media looks amazing, your salon marketing is working.”

Our analysis suggests that assumption is increasingly false, because only 1.5% of website visits come directly from social media platforms compared to up to 65% of visitors who find Salon Guru’s top performing websites through Google searches.

A potential client searching the internet for “balayage specialist near me” is clearly someone who wants to book. Someone watching a transformation reel on Instagram may simply be consuming entertainment.

Phil Evans: *“We are not saying salons should abandon social media. We are saying the industry has massively overestimated its role in generating new client bookings. Today clients are searching for services... not scrolling.”*

Salon Guru’s website analytics from 200+ salons discovered the following trends:

Trend	What We Found
Google dominates	Websites that perform well attract up to 65% of visitors from Google search
AI search does not lead to bookings YET	Up to 35% of people use AI assistants to find out more about a service or salon
Social media contributes surprisingly little traffic	Just 1.5% of website visits come directly from social media platforms

The 5 Second Website Trust Test

Research reveals that users form a judgement about a website's credibility in as little as 50 milliseconds, and consumers expect immediate answers.

If your website is not answering the questions people are asking within 5 seconds, website bounce rates increase sharply, which means clients leave websites without booking.

The challenge is to keep website visitors engaged long enough to encourage them to book.

Before choosing a salon, potential clients typically evaluate four things within moments of landing on a website:



- Can I book easily?
- Is the pricing clear?
- Do the reviews look genuine?
- Can I see real results that match the look I want?

Top Booking Factors For Salons	
Genuine reviews & star rating	Proof is usually the single biggest trust signal for salons. Clients look for recent, detailed reviews, not just a high average score.
Examples of real hair results	Before-and-after photos and hair galleries help clients answer: "Can this salon create the look I want?"
Easy online booking	If booking requires a phone call or waiting for a reply, conversion rates drop. Clients expect 24/7 online booking.
Clear pricing	Transparent pricing reduces anxiety and prevents clients from abandoning the website to compare competitors.
Service information	Many users leave salon websites because they cannot quickly confirm whether the salon offers balayage, perming, curly cutting, extensions, keratin treatments, etc.
Stylist expertise & specialisms	Clients increasingly choose a stylist, not just a salon. They look for experience with blondes, curls, extensions, colour correction, barbering or textured hair.
Trust & professionalism	This includes salon appearance, awards, years in business, team photos, consultation information, policies and professional branding. It creates the feeling that the appointment will be safe and reliable.
Availability & convenience	Clients want to know how soon they can get an appointment, opening hours, late-night availability, parking and location convenience.

A Beautiful Website That Cannot Be Found Is An Expensive Brochure



Salon Guru’s research looked at the most popular key salon phrases people are searching for on the internet and compared this to the most visited web pages.

It revealed the importance of having the right content on your salon website if you want it to be found via Google and AI search.

Salon owners need to include well-written pages with SEO content focusing on the phrases that people are actually searching for. That content needs to be written in a natural way and backed by structured data to help AI find it.

Local language also matters. A UK salon optimising only for “hair salons” may miss significant traffic from users searching “hairdressers”. Conversely, a US business focusing on “hairdressers” may be targeting terminology that many American consumers rarely use.

Most Visited Salon Website Pages	Most Searched Phrases (UK)	Most Searched Phrases (US)
Home page	Hairdressers near me	Hair salons near me
Contact Us	Hairdressers [location]	Haircut near me
Offers	Best hairdressers [location]	Best hair salon near me
Prices	Hair colour	Hair stylist near me
Book	Perms	Balayage
Cuts & Styles	Cut & blow dry price	Hair braiding
Hair Colour	Balayage	Black hair salons
Balayage	Hair extensions	Hair colorist
Curly Hair / Perms	Barbers	Cheap hair salons
Reviews	Curly hair specialist	Walk in hair salons

Website Winners & Losers



Many salon owners believe that having a website means they are visible online, but there is very little point in having a website if no-one is finding it through Google or AI searches.

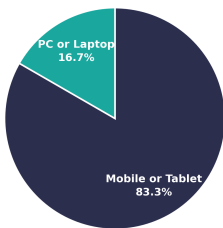
Today’s forward-thinking salon websites have many roles to play. They should be designed to build trust, be found through Google and AI searches, and keep the website visitor engaged.

Phil Evans: “Salon owners need to rethink their websites. While it’s great to have a visually attractive website that reflects your branding and your voice, it must look great on mobile phones, load quickly and be full of current images, trends, staff information and reviews.

“Most importantly, you need Google AND AI to rate your website and salon above your competitors.”

Website Winners	Website Losers
Google and AI visibility	A website that is not Search Engine Optimised
Many reviews	No reviews, old reviews, or very few reviews
Fast-loading speeds	Slow website speeds
Transparent pricing	Hidden prices
Mobile-first design	Looks beautiful on PCs and laptops — but what about mobiles?

The Mobile-First Reality: How Are People Viewing Websites?

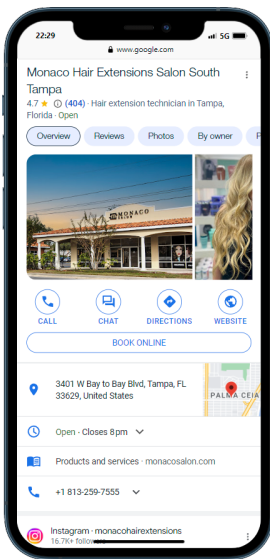


More than 83% of visitors to Salon Guru websites view them on a mobile device. That’s why it’s so important to build a mobile-friendly website.

Mobile features that increase conversion include:

- Large tap-friendly buttons
- Sticky booking navigation
- Click-to-call functionality
- Fast-loading image galleries
- Short, scannable text sections
- Embedded maps with directions

The Importance of Google Business Profiles



Across our 220+ salon clients, **between 20 and 40% of new clients** originated from Google Business Profiles.

Your Google Business Profile is therefore just as important as your website. It tells clients who you are, what services you offer, where you are located and which clients you serve.

A well-optimised profile can increase visibility in Google Search and Google Maps when potential clients search for salons and services, but profiles are also becoming increasingly important for AI search.

A complete and consistently maintained Google Business Profile provides valuable signals about your business, services, location, reputation and relevance.

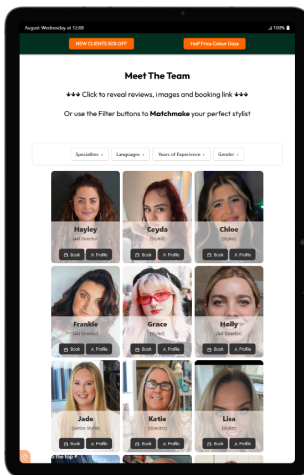
For maximum visibility, a salon's profile should at the very least include:

- Correct business details, services and opening hours
- A direct booking link
- High-quality, recent photographs and videos
- Regular posts and updates
- Lots of genuine, recent reviews with responses

The key is completeness, accuracy, relevance and ongoing activity.

A Google Business Profile shouldn't simply be created and forgotten; it should be treated as an extension of the salon's website and an important part of its local SEO strategy.

Be Relevant, Open & Honest



The strongest-performing salons surveyed by Salon Guru were not necessarily the largest or most expensive. They were the salons that helped visitors answer crucial questions such as “Which stylist is right for me?” and “Can I trust this salon with my hair?”

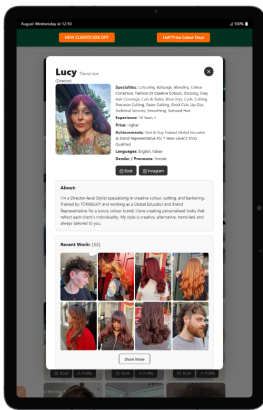
Creating content that is helpful for clients also helps Google and AI decide which websites should rank highly on internet searches. Part of Google’s decision-making takes into account the Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness of each site.

Salon websites that perform the best quickly build trust amongst potential new clients from the moment they land on the website. In order to move quickly to the booking stage, clients should be able to:

- easily browse hairstyles created by stylists,
- read up-to-date reviews that are linked to stylists,
- find and understand your pricing,
- book online with a stylist that matches the client.

This is why personalised stylist matching is becoming increasingly important.

How We Build Trust With 'Showcase Hair'



Salon Guru is delivering this experience through *Showcase Hair*, which builds on the latest Google search framework of Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness to deliver a dynamic website experience for clients.

Showcase is an AI-powered website tool that allows your stylists to upload and tag their best work, display five-star reviews, and help clients find the perfect stylist for their needs.

It puts the spotlight on:

- Your team's skills and experience
- Their incredible work
- Your fabulous client reviews

Powered by AI, Showcase welcomes and guides visitors around your website, helping them discover styles they love and matching them with the perfect stylist.

It transforms your existing website into a live portfolio of your team's latest work, keeping your content fresh, inspiring, and designed to convert more visitors into bookings.

What Clients Think About Showcase

Rob Webb, owner of Voodoo Salon in Liverpool, says:

"Showcase is amazing. Clients can browse our stylists' work, find someone with the right experience, and book directly with them. It gives them the confidence to know they've chosen the right stylist before they even visit."

"Since using Showcase we've seen a huge increase in bookings and the analytics are brilliant – helping us to further improve the client experience."

Real Results

Early data from the Showcase Hair client-to-stylist matchmaking service for salons showed:

Metric	Improvement
Bounce rate	-51%
Bookings	+20%
Booking related actions	+82%

Source: *showcasehair.studio*

Conclusion



There is no doubt that AI is here to stay and salons need to embrace it in the right way if they want to stay ahead of their competitors. The salons that are winning are not chasing traffic — they are building trust at scale.

The data in this report suggests that successful salons in 2026 will focus on:

- **Visibility:** Google Search & SEO, plus AI-readable website content
- **Trust:** Reviews linked to stylist profiles, plus pricing with clear service information
- **Conversion:** Fast, mobile-friendly booking, plus personalised stylist recommendations.

About Salon Guru

Salon Guru is a specialist digital marketing and website agency for hair salons, beauty salons, spas and aesthetic clinics operating across the UK, Ireland, USA, Australia and Dubai.

The company provides:

- Salon website design
- Local SEO
- Google Business Profile optimisation
- AI search optimisation
- Email marketing
- Social media support
- Conversion-focused booking technology

Website: www.salonguru.net | **UK:** 0800 0029193 | **US:** (610) 674-0051

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