



RESEARCH FINDINGS REPORT

LLM.txt Protocol Effectiveness Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bottom Line: Don't implement llm.txt. It doesn't work.

This report presents findings from a 4-month longitudinal study testing the effectiveness of the llm.txt protocol across nine production websites with varying domain authority, traffic patterns, and site maturity. Despite widespread industry coverage and recommendations from marketing outlets, our comprehensive testing revealed zero measurable benefit from implementing llm.txt files.

Key Findings:

- Zero organic traffic to llm.txt endpoints across all nine test sites over 4+ months
- Zero server log requests from AI crawlers or bots to llm.txt files
- LLMs consistently ignored llm.txt files in favor of standard site navigation and content
- LLMs only accessed llm.txt when forced to by explicitly being provided the URL and instructed to read it
- No improvement in AI-generated responses, search visibility, or content discovery
- Format doesn't matter—three distinct implementation styles yielded identical (zero) results

Industry Context:

- Major marketing publications (Search Engine Land, SEMrush) have promoted llm.txt extensively since September 2024
- WordPress plugins (Yoast, Rankmath) added automatic generation features
- Over 784 websites reportedly adopted the protocol
- Zero major LLM platforms have officially confirmed usage
- Google's John Mueller explicitly questioned the protocol's value and recommended noindex headers
- Google removed llm.txt from developer documentation within 24 hours

Conclusion:

The llm.txt protocol provided no measurable benefit and is not currently adopted by major LLM platforms. The gap between industry promotion and platform reality is significant. Organizations considering implementation should redirect resources to proven SEO and content strategies.

This research represents one of the first comprehensive, data-driven studies directly contradicting the llm.txt adoption narrative with extensive server log evidence and LLM testing documentation.

BACKGROUND

Industry Context: The llm.txt Hype Cycle (2024-2025)

The llm.txt protocol was introduced in September 2024 by Jeremy Howard (co-founder of fast.ai) as a proposed web standard designed to help AI systems better understand website content. The concept gained rapid attention throughout 2024-2025, with major marketing and SEO publications aggressively promoting its adoption.

Search Engine Land published multiple articles positioning llm.txt as a "treasure map for AI" and as essential for Answer Engine Optimization (AEO), with pieces like "llm.txt isn't robots.txt: It's a treasure map for AI" and ongoing coverage throughout 2024-2025.

SEMrush published implementation guides recommending llm.txt adoption, describing it as a critical component of modern SEO strategy.

Industry adoption claims suggested that over 784 websites had implemented llm.txt files by late 2024, including major tech companies like Anthropic, Cloudflare, and Stripe, creating an impression of widespread momentum.

WordPress plugin integration followed, with Yoast SEO (June 2025) and Rankmath (July 2025) adding automatic llm.txt generation features, further amplifying adoption recommendations.

The Critical None Platform Adoption Gap

Despite this promotional wave, a fundamental problem remained largely unaddressed in industry coverage: zero major LLM providers officially committed to using the protocol.

- OpenAI, Google, Anthropic, and Meta have not publicly endorsed llm.txt or confirmed active crawling
- Google's John Mueller explicitly questioned the need for LLM-specific Markdown pages, noting that "LLMs have trained on normal web pages since the beginning"

and recommending using noindex headers on llm.txt files to prevent indexing confusion

- Google removed llm.txt documentation from its Search developer docs within 24 hours of initial publication
- Server log analyses by independent researchers showed AI crawlers ignoring llm.txt files entirely

Community Skepticism Emerges (Late 2025)

By late 2025, some critical voices emerged:

- Analysis of 300,000 domains found no correlation between having an llm.txt file and receiving AI citations
- Research on top-performing domains in AI search showed no advantage for sites with llm.txt files
- One investigative piece titled "The llms.txt Standard: Why Nobody Uses It" described it as "an elegant solution nobody's using"
- Technical testing revealed Content-Type header issues preventing many implementations from being read correctly

However, most industry coverage remained promotional, emphasizing theoretical benefits and low implementation effort while minimizing the lack of empirical evidence.

Our Research Objective

Given the disconnect between industry promotion and platform adoption, we conducted a comprehensive real-world test to answer a simple question: **Does llm.txt actually work?**

Unlike theoretical discussions or anecdotal reports, we implemented llm.txt across nine production websites with diverse profiles and monitored every measurable signal over four months. This report presents our data-driven findings, which directly contradict the prevailing industry narrative.

Research Questions:

1. Do LLMs actively request or crawl llm.txt files?
2. Does implementing llm.txt improve content discovery by AI models?
3. Do different llm.txt formats yield different results?
4. What traffic patterns emerge for llm.txt endpoints over time?
5. Is there any measurable ROI to justify implementation effort?

METHODOLOGY

Test Sites & Diversity

Nine production websites across legal and service industries were selected to ensure varied test conditions:

Sites varied by:

- Domain Authority: Range from new domains to established sites with strong rating
- Traffic Levels: Low, medium, and high traffic sites
- Site Age: Recently launched sites to mature, established domains
- Industry: Legal services, photography, bail bonds

This diversity ensured findings would be representative across different site profiles rather than limited to a specific domain authority or traffic tier.

Test URLs by Implementation Style

Three distinct llm.txt implementation styles were tested (3 sites per style):

1. Bitcoin/Strips Style:

- mkfmlaw.com/llm.txt
- elitelawyer.com/llm.txt
- dadsdivorcelaw.com/llm.txt

2. Model Context Protocol Style:

- callrobinson.com/llm.txt
- ovclawyermarketing.com/llm.txt
- mevorahlaw.com/llm.txt

3. GPT Style:

- mezalawfirm.com/llm.txt
- ovcphotography.com/llm.txt
- docsbailbonds.com/llm.txt

Indexing & Visibility

- All llm.txt files manually submitted to Google Search Console for indexing (Oct 31, 2025)
- Weekly monitoring of indexing status throughout test period
- Manual re-submission attempts when pages failed to index

Traffic Monitoring Methods

- Google Analytics 4 (GA4): Weekly checks for page traffic and landing page reports
- Server Log Analysis: Direct examination of Apache/nginx access logs for any requests to llm.txt endpoints
- Bot Traffic Analysis: Specific searches for known AI crawler user agents (GPTBot, Google-Extended, etc.)

LLM Query Testing

Test queries performed across ChatGPT and Google Gemini:

Query Types (approximately 10 queries per site per month):

- General searches: "Tell me about [business name]"
- Exact searches: "[business name] llm.txt"
- Service searches: "Best [service type] lawyer in [location]"
- Forced URL provision: Direct llm.txt URL with instruction to read

Testing Frequency:

- Daily queries during first month
- Weekly query batches during months 2-4
- Log checks conducted weekly throughout entire test period

Documentation

- Screenshots of LLM responses captured throughout testing
 - Server log grep searches documented and timestamped
 - GA4 reports exported at each checkpoint
 - All findings logged in project management system (Basecamp) with timestamps
-

RESULTS

1. Server Log Analysis: Zero Traffic

Comprehensive grep searches across all nine sites' Apache server logs revealed zero requests to llm.txt endpoints over the entire 4-month test period.

Log Analysis Details:

- Logs examined: /var/log/apache2/domlogs/[domain]-ssl_log
- Search command: grep "llm.txt" [log_file] | tail -n 500
- Time period covered: October 2025 - February 2026
- Result: Zero matches across all sites

Sites Examined:

- mezialawfirm
- elitelawyer
- callrobinson
- mkfmlaw
- dadsdivorcelaw
- ovclawyermarketing
- mevorahlaw
- docsbailbonds

Finding: No evidence of any bot, crawler, or automated system attempting to access llm.txt files.

2. Google Analytics 4: No Page Views

Weekly GA4 monitoring showed:

- Zero sessions to llm.txt URLs
- llm.txt pages never appeared in Landing Pages reports
- No referral traffic from AI platforms
- No direct traffic to endpoints

This held true across:

- Sites with high daily traffic (1000+ sessions/day)
- Sites with medium traffic (100-500 sessions/day)
- Sites with low traffic (<100 sessions/day)

Finding: User traffic patterns showed zero interest in or discovery of llm.txt endpoints.

3. Search Engine Indexing: Mixed Results

Despite manual submission via Google Search Console:

- Some llm.txt pages indexed after multiple submission attempts
- Some pages remained unindexed throughout test period
- Indexed pages received zero impressions or clicks in GSC
- No ranking for any llm.txt-related queries

Finding: Even when indexed, llm.txt pages generated no organic search visibility.

4. LLM Query Testing: Ignored Unless Forced

General Business Queries:

When asked about test businesses (e.g., "Tell me about Meza Law Firm"), both ChatGPT and Gemini:

- Provided information from main website pages
- Cited standard website navigation and service pages
- Never referenced or linked to llm.txt files
- Showed no evidence of having accessed structured llm.txt data

Exact llm.txt Searches:

Queries like "[business name] llm.txt" resulted in:

- References to main site content
- General information about the llm.txt protocol
- No direct access to the actual llm.txt file

Forced URL Provision:

Only when explicitly given the URL and instructed (e.g., "Go to mezalawfirm.com/llm.txt and read it"):

- LLMs successfully accessed and read the file
- Content was parsed and understood
- Information was provided as requested

Finding: LLMs are capable of reading llm.txt files but do not proactively seek them out or prioritize them over standard website content.

5. Format Comparison: No Difference Observed

Three distinct llm.txt formatting styles were tested:

- Bitcoin/Strips style (minimal structured text)
- Model Context Protocol style (API-like format)
- GPT style (conversational format)

Result: No format performed better than others. All three styles yielded:

- Zero organic traffic
- Zero LLM preference
- Zero measurable benefit

Finding: Format variation is irrelevant when the protocol itself is not being utilized by LLM platforms.

DISCUSSION

Why The Protocol Failed to Gain Traction

1. Lack of Platform Adoption

Major LLM platforms (OpenAI, Google, Anthropic, etc.) have not publicly committed to using the llm.txt protocol. Without explicit crawler support, the protocol exists in a vacuum.

Google's position is particularly telling: John Mueller questioned why sites would create separate bot-specific pages when "LLMs have trained on – read and parsed – normal web pages since the beginning." Google even removed llm.txt from their developer documentation within 24 hours of initial publication, signaling internal uncertainty about its value.

2. Existing Crawling Mechanisms Are Sufficient

LLMs already have robust methods for discovering and understanding web content:

- Standard web crawling

- Sitemap parsing
- robots.txt compliance
- Meta tag interpretation
- Structured data (JSON-LD, schema.org)

The llm.txt protocol does not solve a problem that LLM platforms currently face. As Mueller noted, AI models have successfully trained on HTML-based web content for years without requiring special Markdown files.

3. No Clear Value Proposition for Platforms

Unlike robots.txt (which saves bandwidth and respects site preferences) or sitemaps (which improve crawl efficiency), llm.txt offers no clear benefit to LLM platform operators. The theoretical advantage of "cleaner" content is negated by the fact that modern AI models are already trained to parse complex HTML, navigate site structures, and extract relevant information.

4. Industry Hype vs. Reality

Marketing publications have promoted llm.txt extensively, but promotion does not equal adoption. Our findings suggest the protocol is discussed far more than it is implemented or utilized by the platforms that matter.

This represents a classic SEO industry pattern: early enthusiasm for a new protocol, plugin integration, widespread promotion, followed by eventual recognition of limited practical value. The llm.txt hype cycle mirrors previous trends like the keywords meta tag (which Google explicitly compared llm.txt to) and other "silver bullet" solutions that promised easy wins without platform buy-in.

Our Findings Contradict Industry Claims

Our real-world testing directly contradicts promotional claims from major marketing outlets:

Claim (Search Engine Land): "llm.txt acts as a treasure map that guides large language models to your best content for citation and inference."

Our Finding: *Zero evidence of any LLM proactively accessing llm.txt files. LLMs consistently relied on standard site navigation and ignored llm.txt endpoints entirely.*

Claim (SEMrush): "llms.txt helps AI systems find your most valuable content without wandering blindly through your site."

Our Finding: LLMs had no difficulty navigating test sites using standard HTML structures. The llm.txt file provided no observable improvement in content discovery or citation accuracy.

Claim (Industry consensus): "Over 784 websites have implemented llm.txt, showing growing adoption."

Our Finding: Adoption by websites is irrelevant without platform support. The fact that websites implement llm.txt does not mean AI platforms use it. Our server logs show zero requests from AI crawlers despite 4 months of monitoring.

Claim (WordPress plugins): Yoast SEO and Rankmath promote llm.txt as a beneficial feature worth enabling.

Our Finding: Automated generation may be convenient, but it doesn't create value if no platforms consume the output. Plugin integration accelerated adoption of an ineffective protocol.

Claim (Search Engine Land tracking study): "Does llms.txt matter? We tracked 10 sites to find out"

Their Finding: Two of 10 sites saw AI traffic increases, but neither was attributable to llm.txt (caused by PR campaigns and product launches instead). Eight sites showed no change.

Our Finding: Aligns with their actual data (as opposed to their hopeful framing). We saw zero traffic across all 9 sites over 4 months.

Positioning Our Research: First Data-Driven Opposition

After extensive web research, we believe this report represents one of the first comprehensive, data-driven studies that openly contradicts the llm.txt adoption narrative.

Most industry coverage falls into three categories:

1. Promotional content (Search Engine Land, SEMrush, various SEO blogs): Emphasizes theoretical benefits and implementation guides while downplaying lack of platform support
2. Cautiously optimistic content (IndexLab, BigCloudy): Acknowledges uncertainty but still recommends implementation as "low-effort with potential upside"
3. Critical analysis without testing (Rye.dev's "Why Nobody Uses It," SE Ranking's skeptical piece): Identifies problems but lacks empirical traffic data

Our study is unique in providing:

- Multi-site longitudinal data (9 sites, 4+ months)
- Direct server log evidence (grep searches showing zero requests)
- Controlled format comparison (3 distinct implementation styles)
- LLM query testing documentation (hundreds of queries across platforms)
- Clear null results with no ambiguity or "maybe in the future" hedging

We found no other published research that combined comprehensive server logs, GA4 data, manual LLM testing, and extended monitoring duration while reaching an unambiguous negative conclusion.

Alternative Explanations for Our Results

We considered several alternative explanations for our null results:

1. Implementation Error: Unlikely, as three different formats were tested and all files were manually verified to be accessible and properly formatted.
2. Insufficient Test Duration: Four months is substantial for observing web traffic patterns. If the protocol were active, some signal would have emerged.
3. Site Authority Issues: Test sites ranged from low to high authority, eliminating this as a variable.
4. Geographic or Industry Limitations: Sites represented multiple industries and geographic markets.

None of these alternative explanations adequately account for the complete absence of any positive signal.

CONCLUSIONS

Primary Conclusions

1. The llm.txt protocol showed zero measurable benefit across all tested dimensions (traffic, crawling, content discovery, AI citations)
2. LLM platforms are not actively crawling or utilizing llm.txt files as of February 2026
3. Format variations in llm.txt implementation make no difference to outcomes
4. Server resources allocated to llm.txt implementation provide no ROI
5. Industry promotion has significantly outpaced actual platform adoption, creating a gap between marketing claims and technical reality

The Verdict: Don't Implement IIm.txt (Yet)

Based on four months of comprehensive testing across diverse production websites, we recommend against implementing IIm.txt until major LLM platforms officially adopt and confirm support for the protocol.

The protocol is not "low-effort with potential upside" as commonly framed. It is effort with no demonstrated upside. Even minimal implementation carries costs:

- Developer time to create and format files
- QA resources to verify implementation
- Ongoing maintenance as site content changes
- Opportunity cost of not working on proven strategies
- Potential indexing confusion (hence Google's noindex recommendation)

These costs, while small, are only justified by measurable returns. Our testing found none.

Practical Recommendations

For website owners and SEO professionals:

DO NOT prioritize IIm.txt implementation

- Zero evidence supports current effectiveness
- No major platform has confirmed active usage
- Resources are better allocated to proven strategies

DO focus on what actually works for AI visibility:

- High-quality, well-structured HTML content (LLMs already parse this effectively)
- Proper semantic markup (header tags, lists, tables)
- Schema.org structured data (actually consumed by search engines)
- Comprehensive internal linking (improves crawlability)
- Fast page load times (reduces crawl burden)
- Mobile optimization (standard for all modern crawlers)
- Clear, descriptive metadata
- robots.txt to control which bots can access your content

IF you still want to experiment with IIm.txt:

- Understand it is purely experimental with no proven benefit
- Implement noindex headers as Google recommends
- Keep implementation minimal (don't invest heavily)
- Don't expect traffic, engagement, or improved citations

- Monitor your own server logs—don't trust marketing claims
- Be prepared to remove it if it creates maintenance burden

MONITOR the protocol's actual evolution (not hype):

- Official announcements from OpenAI, Google, Anthropic
- Documentation confirming crawler support (not speculation)
- Server log evidence from trusted sources
- Academic or industry research with real data
- Disregard promotional content without empirical backing

Challenge Marketing Claims:

The llm.txt conversation has been dominated by optimistic promotion and theoretical benefits. As practitioners with actual data, we have a responsibility to inject reality into the discussion. When you see promotional content about llm.txt:

- Ask for server log evidence
- Request traffic data, not just adoption statistics
- Distinguish between "sites implementing it" and "platforms using it"
- Look for null results, not just success stories
- Demand platform confirmation, not third-party speculation

What Would Change Our Conclusion?

We will revise our recommendation if and when:

1. Major platforms officially announce support (e.g., "OpenAI's GPTBot now crawls llm.txt files")
2. Server logs show actual crawler requests from verified AI bot user agents
3. Controlled testing demonstrates improved citations in LLM responses for sites with llm.txt
4. Google or other search engines integrate llm.txt into their AI-powered features with confirmed behavior

Until then, the evidence is clear: llm.txt does not work.

Limitations of This Study

- Test limited to nine sites
- Test period of four months
- Focus on ChatGPT and Gemini
- English-language, US-based sites only

Despite these limitations, the complete absence of any positive signal across all test sites and monitoring methods provides strong evidence against current protocol effectiveness.

Future Research Directions

- Expanded testing across additional LLM platforms (Claude, Perplexity, etc.)
 - Longer-term monitoring (12+ months) to detect delayed adoption
 - International site testing across different languages and markets
 - Comparison with alternative AI discovery methods (structured data, API endpoints)
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Study design, LLM query testing, and analysis: Chad Castilla

Test site access: OVC client portfolio

Organization: OVC, INC.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Timeline of Key Events

- Oct 31, 2025: Initial llm.txt implementation across all test sites
- Oct 31, 2025: Manual indexing submission to Google Search Console
- Nov 7, 2025: First checkpoint - no GA4 traffic observed
- Nov 10, 2025: LLM query testing begun - models favor standard pages
- Dec 1, 2025: Second checkpoint - no traffic, no indexing improvements
- Dec 15, 2025: Napoleon Griffin confirms no log traffic; research of online commentary shows limited adoption
- Feb 4-5, 2026: Final log analysis confirms zero traffic
- Feb 6, 2026: Decision to publish findings

Appendix B: Example LLM Query Patterns

Site: Meza Law Firm (mezalawfirm.com)

Query 1: "Tell me about Meza Law Firm"

Result: Provided general information from main site pages, no llm.txt reference

Query 2: "Meza Law Firm llm.txt"

Result: Generic information about llm.txt protocol, no specific file access

Query 3: "Go to mezalawfirm.com/llm.txt and tell me what it says"

Result: Successfully accessed and read file content [ONLY when explicitly forced]

Pattern repeated across all nine test sites with consistent results.

Appendix C: Industry Coverage Analysis

Publications Promoting llm.txt (2024-2025):

Search Engine Land:

- "llms.txt isn't robots.txt: It's a treasure map for AI" (promotional framing)
- "Meet llms.txt, a proposed standard for AI website content crawling"
- "Does llms.txt matter? We tracked 10 sites to find out" (found no attributable benefit but maintained optimistic tone)

SEMrush:

- "What Is LLMs.txt & Should You Use It?" (implementation guide)
- Positioned as essential for modern SEO strategy

Plugin Integrations:

- Yoast SEO (June 2025): Automatic llm.txt generation
- Rankmath (July 2025): Customizable llm.txt creation

Critical/Skeptical Coverage:

- Rye.dev: "The llms.txt Standard: Why Nobody Uses It" (identified lack of adoption but no empirical testing)
- SE Ranking: "LLMs.txt: Why Brands Rely On It and Why It Doesn't Work" (analysis of no correlation in 300,000 domains)
- IndexLab: "LLMs.txt: Does It Actually Work?" (cautious with acknowledgment of limited evidence)

- The SEO Community: "The Current Consensus on LLMs.txt: Where Are We Now? (Still No)"

Official Platform Statements:

- Google's John Mueller: Questioned need for separate Markdown pages, recommended noindex, noted LLMs already parse HTML effectively
- Google Search Central: Added then removed llm.txt documentation within 24 hours
- OpenAI: No official confirmation of llm.txt crawling support
- Anthropic: No official confirmation of llm.txt usage

Key Pattern: Industry coverage was overwhelmingly promotional from September 2024 through mid-2025, with critical analysis emerging only in late 2025. Most promotional content emphasized theoretical benefits and "low-effort implementation" while minimizing or ignoring the lack of platform adoption.

Our research contributes the first comprehensive null-results study with extensive server log documentation.

CONTACT & CITATION

For questions about this research, methodology, or access to full documentation:

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We encourage sharing and discussion of these findings. Please:

- Link to the full report rather than cherry-picking findings
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DOCUMENT VERSION HISTORY

Version 1.0 - February 16, 2026

- Initial publication
 - 9 sites tested, October 2025 - February 2026
 - Comprehensive server log analysis, GA4 monitoring, and LLM query testing
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END OF REPORT

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