Summit AI Solutions

FREE GUIDE · WITH CHECKLISTS

The Local SEO and AI Search Checklist for Business Owners

In one afternoon, check how Google, Google Maps and AI assistants see your business, fix the common problems yourself, and leave with a short monthly routine.

By Samuel Wade, Founder

Free tailored SEO audit: summitaisolutions.ai/#free-audit

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Start here

This guide is for people who own or run a local business: a plumber, a lawn care company, a dentist, a roofer, a restaurant, a law office. You do not need to know anything about SEO. You need about an afternoon, the login for your Google account, and your website's address.

What you will be able to do when you finish:

- See your business the way Google, Google Maps and AI assistants see it.
- Fix the most common problems yourself, with no tools to buy.
- Keep it in good shape with a 20-minute check once a month.

How to use it. Each chapter explains why something matters, gives the steps, says what to avoid, and ends with a checklist. Tick the boxes as you go. If you only have an hour, do Chapter 2 (the self-audit) and Chapter 3 (your Google Business Profile) first. The appendix has a one-page plan for the afternoon and the monthly checklist.

What this guide will not do. Nobody can honestly promise you a ranking, a number of calls, or that an AI assistant will recommend you. Google, Maps and AI assistants decide that themselves, and they change. What you can control is whether they find accurate, complete, helpful information about your business. That is what this guide covers. Where Google has written down how something works, we link to Google's own page so you can check it yourself.

Two words you will see:

- **SEO** (search engine optimization) means making your business easy for search engines like Google to find, understand and show to people looking for what you do.
- **AI search optimization** (sometimes called AEO, answer engine optimization) means the same thing for AI assistants such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity, and for the AI answers Google shows at the top of some searches. As you will see, it is mostly the same work.

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CHAPTER 1

How customers find a business now

When someone needs a service today, they usually do one of three things.

1. They search on Google. They type “water heater repair near me” or “best dentist in Logan” and look at the results. Results labelled “Sponsored” are paid ads, separate from everything in this guide. The rest of the page often has three parts:

- **The map pack:** a map with three businesses listed under it. These come from Google Business Profiles.
- **The regular results:** links to websites, with a title and a short description.
- **An AI Overview** at the top of some searches: a written answer Google’s AI puts together, with links to the pages it drew from. Google also has **AI Mode**, a chat-style search.

2. They open Google Maps and search there, or tap “directions” and “call” straight from a business listing.

3. They ask an AI assistant. “Who’s a good roofer near me?” or “What should I ask a plumber before hiring them?” in ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Claude or Copilot. The assistant searches the web, reads some pages, and writes an answer, often naming businesses and linking to sources.

What each one reads

They all build their picture of your business from the same public places:

Place	Google results	Google Maps / map pack	AI assistants
Your website	Yes, the main source	Can help confirm what you do	May be read and quoted
Your Google Business Profile	Yes	Yes, the main source	Google’s own AI uses it; others may see it through search
Directories and listings (Yelp, Bing Places, Apple, Facebook, industry sites)	Yes	Can help confirm your details	May be cited
Reviews	Yes	Yes	May be summarised
Articles and websites that mention you	Yes	Yes	May be read and cited

This is a general picture: each company decides what it reads and shows, and it changes.

Google says its local results are based mainly on three things: **relevance** (how well your listing matches the search), **distance** (how far you are from the person searching, or the area they named) and **prominence** (how well known your business is, including reviews and links from around the web). (Google: Tips to improve your local ranking)

For its AI features, Google says: “There are no additional requirements to appear in AI Overviews or AI Mode, nor other special optimizations necessary.” The same good basics apply. (Google: AI features and your website)

Other AI assistants run their own web crawlers (programs that read websites automatically) or use search partners, and each one decides what to show. You cannot pay to be included, and nobody can make them recommend you.

What this means for you

The work is the same for all three:

1. **One accurate, consistent record** of your business everywhere: same name, phone, hours, services and area.
2. **A website that says clearly what you do, where, and for whom**, with a page for each service and honest answers to the questions customers ask.
3. **Real reviews and real mentions** from real customers and real local organisations.
4. **Nothing blocking the search engines and assistants** from reading your site.

The rest of this guide is those four things, step by step.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] I searched Google for my main service plus my town, and wrote down whether my business shows in the map pack, the regular results, or neither.
- [ ] I searched Google Maps for the same thing and wrote down where I appear.
- [ ] I asked one AI assistant (ChatGPT, Gemini or Perplexity) “Who are good [my service] businesses in [my town]?” and “What does [my business name] do?” and saved the answers with today’s date.
- [ ] I noted anything wrong in those answers (old phone number, wrong services, wrong area).

> AI answers change from day to day and person to person. Treat what you saw as one sample, not a ranking. What matters most is whether the facts about you are right.

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02

CHAPTER 2

A 30-minute self-audit

This chapter finds the problems worth fixing first. You need a computer, your phone, and your Google account.

Step 1. Search for yourself (3 minutes)

- Search your exact business name. Does your website come up first? Does your Business Profile show on the right (computer) or at the top (phone)? Are the phone number and hours right?
- Search **site:yourwebsite.com** (your real address, no spaces). This lists pages Google has in its index (Google's list of pages it can show in results). If nothing comes up, Google may not be indexing your site at all, and that is the first thing to fix. (This is a rough check; Search Console, below, is the accurate one.)

Step 2. Set up Google Search Console (10 minutes, once)

Search Console is Google's free tool that shows how your site appears in Google Search and warns you about problems. If you have not set it up:

1. Go to search.google.com/search-console and sign in.
2. Add your website. A **Domain** property covers every version of your site (with and without "www", http and https) and is verified by adding a record wherever your domain's DNS is managed. A **URL prefix** property is easier to verify if your website builder offers it. (Google: Add a property to Search Console)
3. Submit your sitemap under **Sitemaps** (often yourwebsite.com/sitemap.xml; your website builder will tell you the exact address). A sitemap is a list of your pages that helps Google find them. (Google: Learn about sitemaps)

Data starts to fill in over the following days, so come back in a few days for these two checks:

- Open **Pages** (the Page indexing report). It shows which of your pages Google has indexed and why others were not. "Not indexed" is not always a problem: old addresses that redirect, or duplicate versions, are expected. Look for important pages, such as a service page, that are missing. (Google: Page indexing report)
- Paste your home page address into the search bar at the top (the **URL Inspection** tool). It tells you whether Google has indexed that page and when it last crawled it. (Google: URL Inspection tool)

Step 3. Speed and the phone test (5 minutes)

- Go to PageSpeed Insights, paste your home page and one service page, and run it. Look at the **mobile** result first.

- At the top, if Google has enough visitor data, you will see **Core Web Vitals**: how fast the main content appears, how quickly the page responds to a tap, and how much the layout jumps around while loading. Google recommends good Core Web Vitals but also says good scores alone do not guarantee top rankings. (Google: Core Web Vitals)
- If you see no Core Web Vitals section, Google does not have enough visitor data yet. The lab score (0–100) below is a hint for your web person, not a ranking.
- The suggestions further down are for whoever builds your site. The usual culprits are very large photos, too many plug-ins or pop-ups, and slow hosting.
- Now open your site on your own phone. Can you read it without zooming? Can you tap the phone number to call? Can you find your services and a way to contact you within a few seconds? Google uses the mobile version of your site for indexing and ranking, so the phone version is the one that counts. (Google: Mobile-first indexing)

Step 4. Titles and descriptions (5 minutes)

Every page has a **title** (the blue link in Google results) and usually a **meta description** (the short text under it). Search your business name and look at how your pages appear, or check each page's title in your website builder's SEO settings.

- Each page should have **its own** title that says what is on that page: for example "Water Heater Repair in Logan, UT | Example Plumbing", not "Home" or the same title on every page. Google asks for titles that are "descriptive and concise". (Google: Title links) Google sometimes shows a different title than the one you wrote.
- Each important page should have its own description: one or two plain sentences on what the page offers. Google says identical descriptions on every page "aren't helpful." (Google: Snippets and meta descriptions)
- Do not stuff in keywords ("plumber plumbing plumbers Logan plumber"). Write for a person.

Step 5. Broken links and dead ends (3 minutes)

- Click every item in your menu and footer, on your computer and your phone. Note anything that goes nowhere or shows an error.
- Type yourwebsite.com/this-page-does-not-exist. You should see a "page not found" page with a link back to your home page, not a blank screen and not your home page pretending to be the missing page.

Step 6. One page per service (2 minutes)

List every service you want customers to find you for. Next to each one, write the page on your site that is about **that service**. If several services share one page, or a service has no page, note it. Chapter 6 shows how to fix it.

Step 7. Can a customer actually reach you? (2 minutes)

- Send yourself a message through your own contact form. Did it arrive? How long did it take? Did it land in spam?
- Call the number on your website from a phone that is not yours.

A form that looks like it worked but never reaches your inbox loses enquiries you never see, and it is invisible until you test it.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] My business name search shows my website and my Business Profile, with the right phone and hours.
- [ ] A site: search shows my pages.
- [ ] Search Console is set up, verified, and has my sitemap.
- [ ] I checked the Pages report and noted any important page that is not indexed.
- [ ] I ran PageSpeed Insights on my home page and one service page and saved the mobile results.
- [ ] My site is easy to read and use on my phone, and the phone number is tappable.
- [ ] Every page has its own clear title and description.
- [ ] No broken links in the menu or footer; a missing page shows a proper “not found” page.
- [ ] Each service I want to be found for has its own page (or I listed the ones missing).
- [ ] I tested my contact form and phone number, and both reach me.



Found more unticked boxes than you expected?

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CHAPTER 3

03 Your Google Business Profile

For a local business, the Google Business Profile is often the most important single listing you have: it is what shows in the map pack, on Google Maps, and in the panel when someone searches your name. It is free. Manage it at business.google.com.

Step 1. Make sure you are eligible and listed the right way

Google allows a Business Profile if you have a location customers can visit, or you travel to customers where they are. Read Google's rules once; breaking them can get a profile suspended. (Google: Guidelines for representing your business)

- **If customers come to you** (a shop, an office, a clinic), show your address.
- **If you do both** (customers visit you and you travel to them), show your address and add a service area.
- **If you only go to them** (plumbers, cleaners, landscapers, mobile services), you are a **service-area business**: remove your address from the profile and set a service area instead. Google says "If you don't serve customers at your business address, remove your address from your Business Profile." (Google: Manage your service areas)
- Do not use a P.O. box, a mailbox service, or a virtual office that is not staffed during your business hours as your address. (Google: Guidelines)

Step 2. Your name, exactly as it is in real life

Use your real business name, the one on your sign, your truck and your invoices. Do not add services or towns ("Example Plumbing – Best Plumber Logan Water Heaters"). Google says "Including unnecessary information in your business name isn't permitted." (Google: Guidelines, Name)

Step 3. Categories

- Your **primary category** says what your business *is*. Choose the most specific one that is true: "Plumber", not "Contractor"; "Pediatric dentist" if that is what you are.
- Add a few **additional categories** only for things you really do as a main part of your business.
- Do not pick a category just because more people search for it. A wrong category shows you to the wrong people. (Google: Guidelines, Categories)

Step 4. Services, service area, hours, description

- **Services:** add each service you offer, with a short description in plain words. Use the same names you use on your website.

- **Service area:** add the towns, cities or postal codes you really serve (Google allows up to 20). Keep it realistic: Google's guidance is that the area should generally be within about two hours' drive of where you are based. (Google: Manage your service areas)
- **Hours:** your real hours, plus special hours for holidays. Wrong hours send customers to a closed door.
- **Description:** a few plain sentences: what you do, for whom, where. No links, no prices that change, no claims you cannot back.

Step 5. Photos

Add real photos: your team (with their permission), your vehicles, your work, your premises if customers visit, your logo. Replace them as things change. Do not use stock photos that pretend to be your work. (Google: Manage your Business Profile photos)

Step 6. Posts (optional)

You can post updates, offers and events on your profile. (Google: Create and manage posts) Posts are a good place for real news (a new service, holiday hours, a seasonal reminder). Post when you have something useful to say. There is no magic posting schedule.

Step 7. Get your links right

- **Your review link.** In your profile, find **Ask for reviews** (or "Get more reviews") and copy the link Google gives you. This is the link you will use in Chapter 5. Use the one Google gives you; do not build your own. (Google: Tips to get more reviews)
- **Your profile link.** Search your business name on Google Maps, open your listing, tap **Share** and copy the link. Use it on your website ("Find us on Google") and in your email signature.
- **Your website link.** The website button on your profile should go to the right page: usually your home page, or a location page if you have more than one location. To see in Google Analytics how many visitors come from your profile, add a campaign tag to the end of the link, for example: `https://yourwebsite.com/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=business-profile` (Google Analytics: Campaign URLs) Test the link afterwards: it should open the right page.

What not to do

- Do not create a second profile for the same business, or one for each town you serve.
- Do not invent an address to show up in a different town.
- Do not pay anyone who offers to "rank your profile #1" or sell you reviews.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] I can sign in to my Business Profile, and I (not only a former employee or agency) am an owner.
- [ ] My business name matches my real-world name, with nothing added.
- [ ] Address shown only if customers visit; otherwise a service area is set.
- [ ] My primary category is the most specific true one; extra categories are real.
- [ ] Every service is listed, using the same names as my website.
- [ ] Hours and holiday hours are correct.
- [ ] The description is plain and accurate.
- [ ] At least a handful of real, recent photos.
- [ ] I copied my review link and my profile share link and saved them.
- [ ] My website button goes to the right page and carries a campaign tag.



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CHAPTER 4

04 Name, address and phone consistency, and citations

A **citation** is any listing of your business name, address (or area) and phone number on another website: Yelp, Facebook, Bing, Apple Maps, the Better Business Bureau, your chamber of commerce, industry directories. Search engines and AI assistants compare these. When they all agree, they can be more confident the information is right. When they disagree (an old phone number here, an old address there), they may show the wrong details or trust you less.

Step 1. Write down your one official version

Decide exactly how your details are written, and use that everywhere:

- **Name:** exactly as on your Business Profile.
- **Address:** the same street format everywhere (“Suite 200” or “Ste. 200”, pick one), or no address at all if you are a service-area business.
- **Phone:** one main number, the same everywhere.
- **Website:** the same address everywhere (with or without “www”, whichever your site uses).
- **Hours** and a one-sentence description.

Keep it in a note you can copy and paste from.

Step 2. The listings that matter most

Start with these, then add the ones for your trade:

- **Google Business Profile** (Chapter 3).
- **Bing Places for Business** (bingplaces.com): Bing’s map listings. You can import from your Google profile.
- **Apple Business Connect** (businessconnect.apple.com): Apple Maps and Siri.
- **Facebook** business page, if you have one.
- **Yelp** (biz.yelp.com): claim your free listing.
- **Better Business Bureau** (it may already list you, member or not) and your **local chamber of commerce** if you are a member.
- **Nextdoor** business page, for neighbourhood services.
- **Your industry’s directories:** the ones customers in your trade really use (for example home-service directories for contractors, health directories for clinics, legal directories for lawyers), and any professional or licensing body that lists members.

More is not automatically better. A few accurate, relevant listings beat hundreds of junk directories.

Step 3. Check them by hand

For each listing above, and for anything that shows up when you search your business name and your phone number:

1. Search **"Your Business Name" + your town**, and separately your **phone number in quotes**. Old listings with your number often appear this way.
2. Open each result. Compare name, address, phone, website and hours with your official version.
3. Write down every mismatch and every duplicate (two listings for the same business).

Free online "listing scan" tools can help you spot problems, but they only check the directories they work with. A listing missing from a scan is not proof it does not exist. Check the important ones yourself.

Step 4. Fix them

- **Claim** each listing (most sites have a "Claim this business" or "Is this your business?" link) so you can edit it.
- **Correct** the details to your official version.
- **Report duplicates** through the site's own process and ask for them to be merged or removed. Keep a note of what you asked for and when; some take weeks.
- If you moved or changed your number, start with Google, Bing, Apple, Yelp and Facebook, then work down your list.

What not to do

- Do not buy packages that promise "listings on 300 directories". Most of those sites are never seen by customers, and the listings can be hard to correct later.
- Do not list a fake address or a different name to look local somewhere else.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] I wrote down my one official name, address (or service area), phone, website and hours.
- [ ] My Google, Bing and Apple listings match it.
- [ ] Facebook, Yelp and my industry's main directories match it.
- [ ] I searched my name and my phone number and listed every mismatch and duplicate.
- [ ] I claimed and corrected the listings I could, and asked for duplicates to be removed.
- [ ] I keep a short log of what I changed and requested, with dates.

Rather have someone keep all of this right for you, every month?

Next 3 clients: 50% off and a free website. $8,000 off your first year: Half off the monthly price for 12 months, plus a $2,000 website, free. For an operating business.

Claim the launch offer

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05

CHAPTER 5

Reviews

Reviews matter to customers first: many customers read them before they call. Google lists them as part of how well known a business is, and AI assistants often summarise them. The goal is simple: get honest reviews from real customers, steadily, and reply to them well.

The rules (they are strict)

Google prohibits:

- **Asking only happy customers** to leave a review (sometimes called "review gating"). Google's policy names this: businesses must not "selectively solicit positive reviews from customers." (Google: Maps user-generated content policy)
- **Offering anything in return** for a review: a discount, a gift, an entry into a draw. Google says incentives to post, change or remove reviews are "strictly prohibited." (Google: Tips to get more reviews)
- **Fake reviews:** writing your own, having staff or family review you, or buying reviews. Also leaving negative reviews for competitors.

Breaking these can get reviews removed, warnings shown on your profile, or the profile suspended. Other sites have their own rules: Yelp, for example, asks businesses not to ask for reviews at all. (Yelp: Why you shouldn't ask for reviews) Check each site's rules before you ask there.

Step 1. Ask every customer, the same way, at the same moment

Pick one moment in your process, such as when the job is finished and the customer is happy with the result, or when you send the final invoice. At that moment, ask **every** customer, not just the ones you expect to be pleased. Make it easy and leave the choice to them.

A simple message you can send by text or email:

> "Thank you for choosing [your business]. If you'd like to share your experience, you can leave a Google review here: [your review link]. Your feedback is welcome."

Use the review link you copied in Chapter 3. You can also print it as a QR code on an invoice or a card.

Do not: ask for five stars, tell customers what words to use, stand over them while they write it, or set review quotas for your staff.

Step 2. Reply to reviews

Google says replying shows customers "that you value their feedback." (Google: Manage customer reviews)

- **Good reviews:** thank them by name, mention something specific about the job if you can, keep it short. Do not paste the same reply on every review.
- **Bad reviews:** stay calm, reply within a few days, and do not argue in public. Acknowledge the problem, say what you will do or have done, and offer a way to talk directly (a phone number or email). The owner, or the person responsible, should handle real complaints. Never share a customer's private details in a reply.
- **Reviews that break the rules** (fake, offensive, about a different business): you can report them through your Business Profile. A review you simply disagree with usually stays, so a calm reply is your best answer.

Step 3. Learn from what customers say

Every few months, read your reviews in one sitting. If the same complaint comes up (late arrivals, unclear quotes, slow call-backs), fixing that in your business will do more than any reply.

Step 4. Use real reviews on your website

You can quote real reviews on your website, near the service they talk about, with the customer's first name or business name (with their permission). Do not change their words to make them sound better. Do not add "star rating" code to your website about your own business: Google does not show star ratings for a business reviewing itself, and it can count as misleading markup.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] I chose one moment in my process to ask for reviews.
- [ ] I ask every customer at that moment, using the same neutral message and my real review link.
- [ ] No incentives, no star requests, no review quotas, no fake reviews.
- [ ] I reply to new reviews within a few days, good and bad.
- [ ] I read all my reviews every few months and act on repeated complaints.
- [ ] Any reviews on my website are real, quoted exactly, with permission, and with no star-rating code.

Want a second pair of eyes on your profile, reviews and listings?

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CHAPTER 6

Pages that answer questions

Search engines and AI assistants are trying to answer a person's question. Clear answers make a page easier to understand and more useful to show; no one can promise which page gets shown or quoted. Google's advice is to write "people-first content": content made "primarily for people, and not to manipulate search engine rankings." (Google: Creating helpful, reliable, people-first content)

Step 1. One page for each service

Each main service gets its own page, about that service only. "Drain cleaning" and "water heater installation" are different needs, so they get different pages. Small variations of the same thing ("drain cleaning" and "clogged drain service") do not need separate pages; one good page covers them.

Step 2. Start with a direct answer

The first sentence of the page should say plainly what you do, for whom, and where. For example:

> "Example Plumbing repairs and replaces water heaters for homes in Logan and the rest of Cache Valley, including same-week installation of gas and electric tanks."

(Only say "same-week" if it is true.) A clear first sentence tells a reader, a search engine and an AI assistant straight away what the page is about. Do not open with "Welcome to our website."

Step 3. Answer the questions customers really ask

Think about the last ten phone calls you had about this service. What did people ask? Common ones:

- What exactly is included, and what is not?
- Is this right for my situation? (Repair or replace? Which option?)
- How does it work, step by step, and how long does it take?
- What does it cost, or what affects the cost? (Give a real range only if you are happy to publish one.)
- Which areas do you serve?
- Why should I trust you? (Licences, insurance, years of experience, real reviews, photos of real jobs: only what is true and you can back up.)
- What happens next if I call or fill in the form?

Put the important questions as headings on the page ("How long does a water heater replacement take?") with a short, direct answer underneath, then any detail. Short paragraphs. Plain words.

Step 4. Make it yours

Generic text that could be on any competitor's site helps no one. Add what only you can say: how you actually do the job, real photos of your work, the areas and building types you know well, the mistakes you see customers make. That first-hand detail is what makes a page worth showing.

Step 5. Location pages: only if they are real

If you serve several towns, it is tempting to make a page for each one with the town name swapped. Don't. Copy-paste town pages are thin and unhelpful. A location page is worth making when you have something real to say about that place: a branch there, real jobs there, local rules or conditions, local photos or reviews. Otherwise, list your service area clearly on your service pages and your contact page.

Step 6. Link your pages together

From your home page, link to every service page. From each service page, link to related services and to your contact page. Use plain link text that says where the link goes ("water heater repair", not "click here").

What not to do

- Do not repeat keywords unnaturally or hide text.
- Do not publish pages written in bulk by a tool without checking every fact. A wrong claim on your own site is worse than no page.
- Do not copy text from other websites.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] Every main service has its own page.
- [ ] Each service page starts with one clear sentence: what, for whom, where.
- [ ] Each service page answers the real customer questions under clear headings.
- [ ] Each page includes something only my business can say (process, photos, local detail).
- [ ] No copy-paste town pages; my service area is clearly listed.
- [ ] Home page links to every service; service pages link to related services and to contact.
- [ ] Every claim on the page is true and I could prove it.

Not sure which of your pages needs work first?

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CHAPTER 7

07 Structured data and AI crawler access, in plain words

This chapter is the most technical. You may want to hand it to whoever built your website. The ideas are simple.

Structured data (schema markup)

What it is. Structured data is a small block of code in your page that tells search engines the facts plainly: "this is a business called Example Plumbing, phone number this, open these hours, serving these areas." It uses a shared vocabulary called schema.org. Google describes it as "a standardized format for providing information about a page and classifying the page content." (Google: Intro to structured data) Visitors do not see it.

What to include. For most local businesses, one **LocalBusiness** block (or a more specific type, such as Plumber or Dentist) on the site with: your name, website, phone, address (only if you show it publicly), hours and your logo. Google's page lists the details Google itself uses (Google: LocalBusiness structured data); other details, such as the areas you serve and links to your official profiles, come from the shared schema.org vocabulary and still help describe you. Many website builders and SEO plug-ins add this for you; check that the details match your official version from Chapter 4.

What not to do.

- Do not mark up anything that is not visible or not true.
- Do not add review or star-rating markup about your own business (see Chapter 5). (Google: Review snippet rules)
- Do not add a hidden address if you are a service-area business.
- Do not add FAQ or "how-to" markup expecting special results: Google no longer shows FAQ or How-to rich results in Search. Questions and answers written on the page in plain text are still useful to readers and to search engines.

How to check it. Paste a page into the Schema Markup Validator (validator.schema.org) to see whether the markup is readable and error-free. Google's Rich Results Test (search.google.com/test/rich-results) shows only what Google can turn into special results. If you are a service-area business, leave the address out even though Google's test may warn that it is missing. Structured data helps search engines understand your facts; it does not guarantee any special appearance or ranking.

AI crawler access: who is allowed to read your site

Search engines and AI companies use automated programs called **crawlers** (or bots) to read websites. A small file on your site, **robots.txt** (at yourwebsite.com/robots.txt), tells them what they may read.

There are two kinds of AI-related crawlers, and they are controlled separately:

Crawler	Company	What it is for
Googlebot	Google	Google Search, including AI Overviews and AI Mode
Google-Extended	Google	A separate control for Google's AI training and Gemini grounding; Google says it "does not impact a site's inclusion in Google Search" (Google: Common crawlers)
OAI-SearchBot	OpenAI	Showing websites in ChatGPT's search results
GPTBot	OpenAI	Collecting content that may be used to train OpenAI's models (OpenAI: Overview of OpenAI crawlers)
PerplexityBot	Perplexity	Showing and linking websites in Perplexity's answers (Perplexity: Crawlers)
ChatGPT-User	OpenAI	Visits a page when a ChatGPT user asks about it
Perplexity-User	Perplexity	The same, for Perplexity users
Claude-SearchBot and Claude-User	Anthropic	Search results, and pages fetched for a Claude user's question (Anthropic: crawlers)
ClaudeBot	Anthropic	Anthropic's training crawler (Anthropic: Does Anthropic crawl data from the web?)
Bingbot	Microsoft	Bing search

The "-User" visitors act for one person's question and may not follow robots.txt; for ChatGPT's search results, the control that matters is OAI-SearchBot.

What to do:

1. Open yourwebsite.com/robots.txt in your browser. If it says `Disallow: /` under `User-agent: *`, it is blocking everything. That is sometimes left over from when the site was being built. Fix it straight away.
2. Make sure the **search** crawlers (Googlebot, Bingbot, OAI-SearchBot, PerplexityBot, Claude-SearchBot and the "-User" fetchers) are not blocked. If they cannot read your site, they cannot show or quote it.

3. Whether to allow **training** crawlers (GPTBot, Google-Extended, ClaudeBot) is a separate choice for you to make. Blocking GPTBot or ClaudeBot does not remove you from ChatGPT or Claude search results, and blocking Google-Extended does not affect Google Search, AI Overviews or AI Mode. But Google-Extended also controls whether Gemini can use your pages when it answers, so blocking it may keep you out of Gemini answers. Allowing any of them does not get you recommended.
4. Some website hosts and security services (firewalls, "bot protection") block AI crawlers by default. If you use one, check its settings.

Myths to ignore

- **"You need an llms.txt file."** It is a proposed file some people promote for AI assistants. Google says: "You don't need to create new machine readable files, AI text files, or markup to appear in these features." (Google: AI features) No major AI company has confirmed using it to choose what to cite. It is not something you need to spend time on.
- **"AI SEO is completely different from SEO."** For a local business it is mostly the same work: accurate facts everywhere, clear pages that answer questions, real reviews and mentions, nothing blocked.
- **"Pay us and ChatGPT will recommend you."** Nobody can promise that.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] My site has LocalBusiness (or a more specific type) structured data, and its details match my official version.
- [ ] No star-rating markup about my own business; no hidden address in the markup.
- [ ] The Schema Markup Validator reads my markup without errors (a missing-address warning from Google's test is expected for a service-area business).
- [ ] My robots.txt does not block everything.
- [ ] Search crawlers (Googlebot, Bingbot, OAI-SearchBot, PerplexityBot, Claude-SearchBot) can read my site.
- [ ] I have made a deliberate choice about training crawlers (or decided to leave the default).
- [ ] My host or firewall is not blocking the crawlers I want.

Would you rather hand the technical part to someone else?

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CHAPTER 8

Links that are real

A **link** is when another website links to yours. A **mention** is when another website names your business, with or without a link. Both help search engines and AI assistants see that real people and organisations know about you. Quality matters far more than quantity: one link from your local newspaper or your trade association is worth more than hundreds from sites nobody visits.

Where real links and mentions come from

Start with the relationships you already have:

- **Suppliers and manufacturers** you buy from or are certified by: many have “find an installer” or dealer pages.
- **Trade associations, licensing bodies and your chamber of commerce:** member directories.
- **Local organisations you support:** a youth sports team you sponsor, a charity event, a school fundraiser. They often list sponsors on their website.
- **Businesses you work alongside:** a builder who refers you, a property manager, a complementary trade. If you really refer customers to each other, it is reasonable to list each other.
- **Local news and community sites:** a new location, a community project, useful seasonal advice. Offer something worth reading, not an advert.
- **Mentions without a link:** search your business name and look for pages that mention you without linking. A polite email asking them to add your website address is worth sending.

Sponsorships and paid placements

Paying to sponsor a local event is fine when the event is worth supporting for its own sake. If you pay for a listing or a link, Google’s rule is that the link should be marked as paid (with `rel="sponsored"` or `rel="nofollow"`), and buying links to boost rankings breaks Google’s spam policies. (Google: Spam policies, link spam; Google: Qualify outbound links)

What to avoid

- Buying links, “guest post” packages or “high authority backlinks”.
- Link exchanges with sites that have nothing to do with you.
- Hundreds of directory submissions.
- Anyone promising a target “domain authority” score. Those scores come from SEO tool companies, not from Google, and chasing them does not get you customers.

Check that it happened

When someone says they have added a link or mention, open the page yourself. Is your business named correctly? Does the link go to the right page? Keep a simple list of real links and mentions with dates.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] I listed my suppliers, associations, chamber, sponsored organisations and referral partners.
- [ ] I checked whether each one lists my business and website, and asked politely where it is missing.
- [ ] I searched my business name for unlinked mentions and asked for a link where it makes sense.
- [ ] Any paid listings are marked as paid; I am not buying links.
- [ ] I keep a dated list of real links and mentions I have checked myself.

Want the whole list done for you, with a report every month?

Next 3 clients: 50% off and a free website. $8,000 off your first year: Half off the monthly price for 12 months, plus a $2,000 website, free. For an operating business.

Claim the launch offer

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CHAPTER 9

09 Measuring: a 20-minute monthly routine

You cannot improve what you never look at, but you also do not need to check every day. Once a month, on the same day, spend 20 minutes on this and write down the numbers in a simple spreadsheet. Compare each month with the month before and the same month last year; many businesses are seasonal.

1. Google Search Console (5 minutes)

Open **Performance** (Search results) and set the dates to the last full month. (Google: Performance report) Write down:

- **Clicks:** how many times people clicked through to your site from Google.
- **Impressions:** how many times your site was shown in results.
- Under **Queries**, the searches that bring you clicks. Are they searches for the services you want to be found for?
- Under **Pages**, which pages get clicks. Are your service pages there?

Also glance at the **Pages** (indexing) report for new problems.

2. Google Business Profile performance (5 minutes)

In your profile, open **Performance**. Write down calls, website clicks, direction requests and (if you use them) messages and bookings for the month.

3. Your enquiries and jobs (5 minutes)

This is the number that matters most, and no tool counts it for you.

- How many calls and form enquiries did you get this month?
- How did each one find you? (Ask on the phone: “How did you hear about us?”)
- How many became booked jobs?

If you use Google Analytics 4 (GA4, Google’s free visitor-tracking tool), ask whoever built your site to set up an event for form submissions and for taps on your phone number, then mark both as **key events** (actions you mark as important) so you can see which pages and sources they come from. Remember: an analytics count of a form submission is not proof the message reached you. Your own inbox and job list are the real record.

4. Quick checks (5 minutes)

- Search your business name and your main service plus town, once. Note anything that changed.
- Ask one AI assistant the same two questions as in Chapter 1 and note whether the facts about you are right. Fix wrong facts at the source (your website, your profile, the listing it came from).
- Read new reviews and reply to any you missed.
- Test your contact form once.

What not to obsess over

- **Daily rankings.** Positions move every day and differ by location and device. A single check from your own phone is not your “ranking”.
- **SEO tool scores** (domain authority, site health scores): useful hints, not results.
- **Total traffic** from places that will never become customers.
- **Word counts and keyword counts.** Google has no magic length.
- **One bad week.** Look at full months.

When something changes, do not assume your last edit caused it. Many things change at once: seasons, competitors, Google’s own updates.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] I picked a day each month for this routine.
- [ ] I record Search Console clicks, impressions, top queries and top pages.
- [ ] I record Business Profile calls, website clicks and direction requests.
- [ ] I record enquiries, where each came from, and how many became jobs.
- [ ] My form submissions and phone clicks are key events in Google Analytics (if I use it).
- [ ] I do a monthly AI answer check and fix wrong facts at the source.
- [ ] I compare full months, not days.

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CHAPTER 10

When to get help

Everything in this guide is something you can do yourself. It takes time, and it never quite finishes: services change, competitors change, Google and the AI assistants change.

FREE · FOR AN OPERATING BUSINESS WITH A WEBSITE

Want a second pair of eyes?

Free tailored SEO audit: a short written report of your top issues and our recommendations, then an optional call to walk you through it.

You can use the report to fix things yourself, or hand it to whoever runs your website.

No website yet? Get in touch and we will point you to the right next step. Not running a business yet? This guide is the right place to start.

What we will never do is promise you rankings, a number of leads, or that an AI assistant will recommend you. Nobody can honestly promise those.

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Would you rather we did the work, every month?

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APPENDIX

The afternoon plan and the monthly checklist

A. The afternoon plan

Time	Do	Chapter
10 min	Search yourself on Google, Maps and one AI assistant; save what you see	1
30 min	The self-audit: Search Console, speed, phone test, titles, links, form test	2
45 min	Business Profile: name, categories, services, area, hours, photos, links	3
45 min	Write your official details; check and fix Bing, Apple, Facebook, Yelp and your industry's main directory	4
15 min	Set up your review request: the moment, the message, the link	5
30 min	List your services and their pages; rewrite the first sentence of each service page	6
15 min	Check robots.txt and your structured data (or send Chapter 7 to your web person)	7
15 min	List your real relationships for links and mentions	8
10 min	Set up your monthly spreadsheet and pick your monthly day	9

B. The monthly checklist

EVERY MONTH

- [ ] Search Console: clicks, impressions, top queries, top pages; check the Pages report.
- [ ] Business Profile: calls, website clicks, direction requests; update hours if anything changes.
- [ ] Enquiries and booked jobs, with where each came from.
- [ ] One search for my name, one for my main service plus town.
- [ ] One AI answer check; fix wrong facts at the source.
- [ ] Reply to new reviews; keep asking every customer the same way.
- [ ] Test the contact form and the phone number.
- [ ] One improvement: a better answer on a service page, a new real photo, a fixed listing, or a real local mention.

Thank you for reading. Every box you tick is one less thing standing between a customer and your business.

Samuel Wade, Founder, Summit AI Solutions

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This guide describes how Google and AI assistants worked when it was written (November 2026) and links to their own documentation, which can change. It is general guidance, not a promise of any result.