FREE GUIDE · 2026 EDITION

The Local Growth Blueprint

5 steps to get more customers for your local service business, from Google Maps to AI search.

1 · Google Business Profile
2 · Reviews
3 · Website
4 · SEO + AEO
5 · AI automation

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START HERE

Your customers are already searching. This guide makes sure they find you.

Every month, people in your area search Google, Google Maps and AI tools like ChatGPT for exactly what you do. Most of them hire one of the first few businesses they see. This guide walks you through the five things that decide whether that's you.

It's the same plan I'd follow if I ran a plumbing, HVAC, roofing, landscaping or cleaning business today. Nothing here requires a big budget. Most of it costs nothing but time, and you can do every step yourself.

How to use this guide

1. **Take the 2-minute scorecard** on the next page to see where you stand.
2. **Start with your lowest-scoring step.** Each step has a "why it matters," a step-by-step walkthrough, common mistakes, and a checklist.
3. **Follow the 30-day plan** at the end if you'd rather do it in order, a little each week.

The five steps

Step	What it gets you
1. Google Business Profile	Shows up in Google Maps and the local results at the top of Google.
2. Reviews	Pushes you up the local rankings and wins the click over competitors.
3. A real website	Turns profile visitors into calls, texts and booked jobs.
4. SEO + AEO	Gets you found on Google and recommended by AI assistants.
5. AI automation	Answers customers instantly, even when you're on a job.
Bonus: Social + ads	Spreads the word and speeds up growth once the basics work.

Prefer to watch first?
This guide goes with the video **"How to Get More Customers for Your Local Service Business (2026 Guide)"** on the TJS Design YouTube channel.

2-MINUTE SCORECARD

Where do you stand?

Check "Yes" only if it's fully true today. Give yourself 1 point for each yes.

	Statement	Yes	No
1	My Google Business Profile is verified and every section is filled in.	☐	☐
2	My profile has at least 20 real photos of my team, vehicles and work.	☐	☐
3	I've posted to my profile in the last 14 days.	☐	☐
4	I have 25+ Google reviews with a 4.5+ star average.	☐	☐
5	I got at least one new review in the last 30 days.	☐	☐
6	I reply to every review, good and bad.	☐	☐
7	I have a website linked from my Google Business Profile.	☐	☐
8	My website loads fast on a phone and has a tap-to-call button.	☐	☐
9	My site has a separate page for each main service I offer.	☐	☐
10	My site is submitted to Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools.	☐	☐
11	My site answers common questions: pricing, service area, hours, timelines.	☐	☐
12	Texts, chats or calls that come in after hours get an answer within minutes.	☐	☐

Your score

0–5: Invisible
Most searchers can't find you or pick someone else. Start with Steps 1 and 2. They're free and fast.

6–9: Getting found
You have the basics. Steps 3 and 4 turn more of those searches into booked jobs.

10–12: Ahead of the pack
You're beating most local competitors. Step 5 and the bonus section are your next edge.

STEP 1

1 Build a complete Google Business Profile

Your Google Business Profile is the listing that shows up in Google Maps and the local results at the top of Google. For most local searches, it's the first thing a customer sees, before your website.

Why it matters

Google shows the businesses it's most confident about. A profile with every field filled in, plenty of photos and recent activity gives Google more reasons to show you, and gives customers more reasons to call.

Step by step

1. **Claim and verify your profile.** Search for your business on Google. If a profile exists, choose "Own this business?" If not, go to google.com/business and create one. Google will verify you, often by video, phone or postcard. You can't edit much until you're verified.
2. **Pick the right primary category.** This is the single biggest setting on your profile. Use the most specific match ("Plumber," not "Contractor"). You can add up to 9 secondary categories for other things you do, like "Water heater installation service."
3. **Set your address and service area.** If customers don't come to you, hide your street address and list the cities or ZIP codes you serve (up to 20). If you have a shop customers visit, show the address.
4. **Use your real business name.** Don't add keywords or cities to your name ("Joe's Plumbing – Best Plumber Sandy UT"). Google can suspend profiles for it.
5. **Fill in hours, including holiday hours.** Being listed as open when someone searches helps you show up.
6. **Add your phone, website and a professional email.** Use a number you actually answer, and an email at your own domain if you have one.
7. **List every service you offer.** Add each one separately with a short description and a price range if you're comfortable. These help you match more searches.
8. **Write a strong business description.** You get 750 characters. Say what you do, where you do it and why customers choose you. Write for people, not search engines.

9. **Upload real photos, and keep adding them.** Aim for 20+ to start: your team, your trucks, your shop, and before-and-after shots of real jobs. Then add a few new ones every month. Skip stock photos.
10. **Turn on chat.** In your profile's contact settings, add a text (SMS) or WhatsApp number so customers can message you straight from Google. Many people would rather text than call.
11. **Post every week.** Use profile posts to share a finished job, a seasonal tip or a special offer. One short post a week with a photo is plenty.

Use AI to stay consistent

Ask an AI tool like ChatGPT or Claude: *"Write four short Google Business Profile posts for a [your trade] in [your city] for next month: one finished job, one seasonal tip, one offer, one customer story."* Edit them so they sound like you, add your own photos, and schedule them.

Common mistakes

- Stuffing keywords into your business name.
- Listing an address that's really a P.O. box or a virtual office.
- Letting the profile sit untouched for months.
- Letting your name, address and phone differ between Google, Yelp, Facebook and your website. Keep them identical everywhere.

Step 1 checklist

- [ ] Profile claimed and verified
- [ ] Most specific primary category + relevant secondary categories
- [ ] Service area or address set correctly; hours (and holiday hours) filled in
- [ ] Phone, website and professional email added
- [ ] Every service listed with a description
- [ ] 750-character description written
- [ ] 20+ real photos uploaded; chat turned on
- [ ] Weekly posting schedule in place

STEP 2

2 Collect reviews on a steady schedule

Reviews are one of the biggest ranking factors you control, and often what makes a customer pick you over the business next door.

Why it matters

Google ranks local results on three things: **relevance** (do you offer what they searched for), **distance** (how close you are) and **prominence** (how well known and trusted you are). Reviews feed prominence. Your review count and star rating matter, and local SEO experts consistently find that steady, recent reviews help too.

Step by step

1. **Get your review link.** In your Google Business Profile, choose "Ask for reviews" to copy a short link that opens the review form directly. Save it in your phone.
2. **Ask at the moment of satisfaction,** right after the job while the customer is happy.
3. **Text the link the same day, to every customer.** Make it part of how every job ends. A same-day text beats an email a week later.

Copy-and-paste review request

> Hi [Name], thanks for having us out today! If you were happy with the work, would you mind leaving us a quick Google review? It really helps a small business like ours: [your review link]. – [Your name], [Business]

Reply to every review within a few days

Thank happy customers by name. For unhappy ones, stay calm, keep it short, and offer to fix it offline.

> **Positive:** Thanks so much, [Name]! Glad we could get your [water heater] sorted out quickly. We're here anytime you need us.

> **Negative:** [Name], I'm sorry this wasn't the experience you expected. I'd like to make it right. Please call me directly at [number]. – [Your name], owner

Rules you can't break

Never pay or give discounts for reviews, never ask only happy customers ("review gating"), and never post fake reviews. Google can suspend your profile, and the FTC can fine you.

Step 2 checklist

- [ ] Review link saved
- [ ] Request text saved
- [ ] Every job ends with an ask
- [ ] Every review gets a reply

STEP 3

3 Link a website that turns visits into calls

Your profile gets you found. Your website is where people decide to call you or keep scrolling.

Why it matters

In a BrightLocal study of 45,000 business profiles, **56% of customer actions** on a profile were website clicks, more than calls or requests for directions. For roofing, landscaping and cleaning businesses it was even higher, around 73–75%. If there's no website, or one that looks abandoned, those people go back and tap your competitor.

What your website needs

1. **A clear headline that says what you do and where.** "Fast, honest plumbing in Sandy and South Jordan" beats "Welcome to our website."
2. **Tap-to-call, text and booking buttons at the top of every page,** sized for a thumb on a phone.
3. **A page for each main service.** "Water heater repair," "Drain cleaning" and "Sewer line replacement" each get their own page. One "Services" page with a list isn't enough.
4. **Your service area,** listed plainly by city or neighborhood.
5. **Proof:** reviews, before-and-after photos, years in business, licenses and insurance, and any guarantees.
6. **Real photos** of you, your team and your work instead of stock images.
7. **A simple contact or booking form** that asks only for what you need.
8. **Fast loading on a phone.** Most of your visitors are on their phones, often on cell data. Test your site at pagespeed.web.dev.

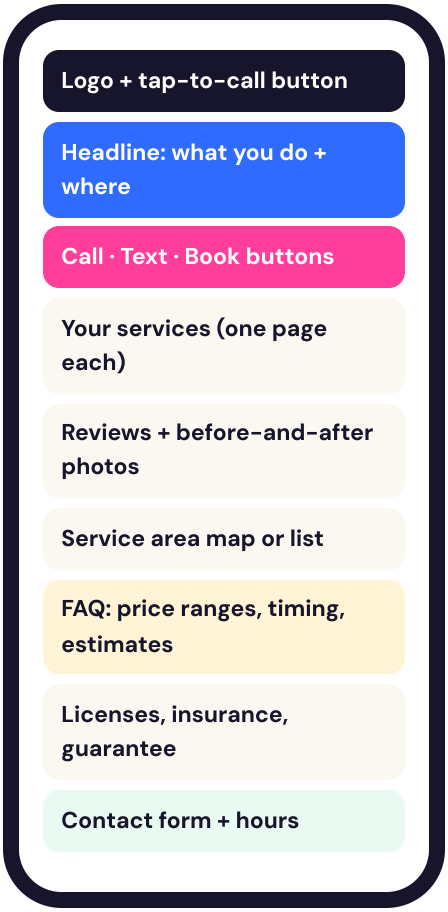
Connect it to your profile the right way

1. **Add the website link to your Google Business Profile.**
2. **Make sure your business name, address and phone number match exactly** between your website and your profile.
3. **Track profile visits.** Add tracking tags to the link on your profile so you can see in Google Analytics how many visitors come from it:

   > https://yoursite.com/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=gbp

4. **Set up Google Analytics 4** so you can see visits, calls and form submissions over time.

A homepage that converts, top to bottom



This is the order most visitors scroll on a phone. The most important things, who you are, where you work and how to reach you, sit at the top where nobody has to scroll to find them.

Everything below builds trust: proof you do good work, that you serve their area, and answers to the questions they'd otherwise call to ask.

Each service in the list should link to its own page with the same structure.

Common mistakes

- A phone number that's an image, so it can't be tapped.
- Huge, uncompressed photos that make the site crawl on a phone. Test it: load your site on your phone, on cell data.
- A website builder template no one has touched since setup, with placeholder text still showing.
- No way to contact you except a form that goes to an email you never check.

Step 3 checklist

- [ ] Website linked from Google Business Profile, with tracking tags
- [ ] Headline says what you do and where
- [ ] Tap-to-call, text and book buttons on every page
- [ ] A page for each main service + a clear service area
- [ ] Reviews, real photos, licenses and guarantees shown
- [ ] Loads fast on a phone; Google Analytics 4 installed

STEP 4

4 Get found on Google and in AI answers (SEO + AEO)

A website only works if people can find it. SEO gets you found in search results. AEO gets you named when people ask AI assistants for a recommendation.

Part A: Search engine optimization (SEO)

1. Find the words your customers use

- Type your service into Google and note the autocomplete suggestions ("water heater repair near me," "water heater repair cost").
- Check "People also ask" in the results. Those are real questions you should answer on your site.
- In your Google Business Profile, open **Performance** to see the actual searches people used to find you.
- Combine services with locations: "[service] in [city]."

2. Put those words in the right places

- **Page title** (what shows in the browser tab and search results): "Water Heater Repair in Sandy, UT | Joe's Plumbing."
- **Main headline** on the page, the first paragraph, and image descriptions (alt text).
- One main topic per page. Don't make one page try to rank for everything.

3. Get indexed

1. **Create a sitemap.** Most website platforms make one automatically, usually at yoursite.com/sitemap.xml.
2. **Submit it to Google Search Console** (search.google.com/search-console) and **Bing Webmaster Tools** (bing.com/webmasters). Bing matters more than you'd think, because several AI tools draw on Bing's results.
3. **Add structured data (schema).** This is code that tells search engines your business type, address, hours and services in a format they read directly. Use the most specific type, such as Plumber, HVACBusiness, RoofingContractor or Electrician. Your web developer or website platform can add it.

4. List your business consistently across the web

Claim free listings on **Bing Places**, **Apple Business Connect** (for Apple Maps and Siri), Yelp, Facebook, Nextdoor and your local chamber of commerce. Use the exact same name, address and phone everywhere.

Part B: Answer engine optimization (AEO)

More customers now ask ChatGPT, Gemini, Grok or Google's AI Overviews questions like *"Who's a well-reviewed roofer near me that does free estimates?"* These tools pull answers from websites, listings and reviews. AEO means making your information easy for them to find, understand and quote.

1. **Answer real questions in plain language.** Add an FAQ section to each service page: "How much does a water heater replacement cost in Sandy?" "Do you offer same-day service?" "Do you charge for estimates?"
2. **Lead with the answer.** Put a direct one- or two-sentence answer first, then the details. AI tools favor content that answers clearly.
3. **Publish the facts AI tools look for:** services, price ranges, service area, hours, response times, warranties, licenses and years in business.
4. **Mark up your FAQs and business details with schema** so machines can read them reliably.
5. **Keep information consistent everywhere.** If your hours differ between your website and Yelp, AI tools may skip you or get it wrong.
6. **Earn mentions.** Reviews, local news, supplier "find a pro" directories and community sites all help AI tools trust you.

Try this today

Ask ChatGPT, Gemini and Google: *"Best [your service] in [your city]?"* Note who shows up and what details the answers mention. That's your gap list.

Where this is heading

Google's CEO has described the future of search as an "agent manager": AI that doesn't just answer questions but gets things done. New standards already let AI assistants book appointments directly through a business's website. All of that plugs into one thing: a real website on your own domain, full of clear answers about your business. Build that foundation now, and you'll be ready as these tools roll out.

Step 4 checklist

- [ ] Keyword list of services + cities
- [ ] Page titles and headlines use those keywords
- [ ] Sitemap submitted to Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools
- [ ] Business schema added
- [ ] FAQ section on each service page; prices, area and hours published
- [ ] Bing Places, Apple Business Connect and other listings claimed and matching

STEP 5

5 Put AI to work in your business

Every missed call or unanswered text after 6 p.m. is a job that might go to someone else. AI can answer for you, instantly, while you're on a roof or at dinner.

What AI can handle today

Texts and website chat
Answer common questions, collect job details and photos, and offer appointment times.

Phone answering
AI receptionists can answer calls in a natural voice, take messages, qualify leads and book jobs.

Email
Draft replies to quote requests and follow-ups for you to approve.

Marketing busywork
Draft profile posts, review replies and social captions in minutes.

Start small: one step at a time

1. **After-hours text replies.** Set up an automatic text that answers right away when someone texts or calls after hours, and offers to book a time. This is the easiest, highest-return first step.
2. **Website chat.** Add an AI chat assistant trained on your services, prices, service area and FAQs, with a handoff to you for anything it can't answer.
3. **Phone answering.** Once you trust it, let an AI receptionist answer overflow and after-hours calls and put jobs on your calendar.
4. **Connect it to your calendar and CRM** so bookings and customer details land in one place.

Guardrails

- **Always offer a human.** Make it easy to reach you for anything urgent or unusual.
- **Feed it accurate information,** and review its answers regularly for the first few weeks.
- **Follow texting rules.** Replying to a customer who texted you first is generally fine, but marketing texts require the customer's consent. Check the rules before you send promotions.
- **Be upfront.** Let customers know when they're talking to an AI assistant.

Step 5 checklist

- [ ] After-hours auto-reply live
- [ ] Website chat with human handoff
- [ ] FAQ document written for the AI
- [ ] Bookings flow to your calendar

BONUS

Social media + paid ads

Everything in Steps 1–5 is organic: it costs very little to run day to day. Once it's working, social media and paid ads multiply it.

Social media: create once, share everywhere

1. **Pick two platforms** where your customers already are. For most local service businesses that's Facebook and Instagram, plus Nextdoor for neighborhood word of mouth.
2. **Reuse your weekly profile post.** The same finished-job photo and caption works on Google, Facebook, Instagram and Nextdoor.
3. **Show the people behind the business.** Your crew, short job videos and before-and-afters beat polished graphics.
4. **Link everything together:** social profiles link to your website, and your website links to your social profiles.

Paid ads: start with Google Local Services Ads

Local Services Ads are the listings at the very top of Google, marked with a **"Google Verified"** badge. For many trades they're the best first paid step:

- **You pay per lead, not per click.** You're charged when a customer contacts you through the ad, and you can dispute leads that aren't valid.
- **The badge builds trust.** Google checks things like your license, insurance and background before you can run them.
- **Your reviews matter here too,** which is one more reason Step 2 comes first.

After that, regular Google Search ads on the same keywords from Step 4 let you show up for even more searches. Start with a small monthly budget, track which leads turn into jobs, and grow what works.

The order matters

Ads send people to your profile and website. If those aren't ready, you pay to send customers somewhere that doesn't convince them. Fix Steps 1–3 first, then turn on ads.

YOUR 30-DAY PLAN

A little each week

About 2–3 hours a week. By day 30, you'll be ahead of most of your local competitors.

Week	Focus	Do this
Week 1	Google Business Profile	Claim and verify. Fix your category, service area, hours and services. Write your description. Upload 20+ photos. Turn on chat.
Week 2	Reviews	Save your review link and request text. Ask every customer this week. Reply to every existing review. Publish your first weekly post.
Week 3	Website	Test your site on your phone. Add tap-to-call buttons, service pages and your service area. Link it from your profile with tracking tags. Install Google Analytics 4.
Week 4	SEO, AEO + AI	Build your keyword list. Update page titles. Add FAQs. Submit your sitemap to Google and Bing. Claim Bing Places and Apple Business Connect. Turn on an after-hours auto-reply.
Every week after	Keep it going	One profile post, review requests on every job, replies to every review, a few new photos each month.

Track your progress monthly

Measure	Where to find it	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3
Total Google reviews	Your profile			
Calls from your profile	Profile → Performance			
Website clicks from profile	Profile → Performance			
Website visitors	Google Analytics 4			
Jobs booked	Your records			

Retake the scorecard on page 3 at the end of the month and compare.

Rather have someone do it for you?

You can do everything in this guide yourself. If you'd rather spend your time on jobs, that's what I do.

CUSTOM WEBSITE

$999.99

one-time, flat rate

A fully custom, mobile-ready website with SEO, AEO, Google and Bing indexing and Google Analytics set up. Delivered in under 14 business days.

ONGOING MANAGEMENT

$129.99/mo

optional

Updates, maintenance, security and changes handled for you, with a monthly update call and direct support.

I'm Trevor Spencer, founder of TJS Design. I've spent 12+ years in digital marketing and product management, and I now build websites for local service businesses. One expert, start to finish, at a flat rate.

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