

THE 2026 LOCAL DISCOVERABILITY PLAYBOOK

Get *Found.*

When someone needs what you do, make sure Google **and** ChatGPT send them to you. A step by step field guide for the local business owner who is tired of being invisible.

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The statistics in this guide are drawn from named third party sources, cited where they appear and listed in full in the Appendix. Search platforms change their systems often. Treat the numbers as direction and the methods as durable.

“The business that is easiest to find is not always the best one. It is the one that made itself easy to find.”

A working principle, not a promise.

How to get the most out of this

Read it once end to end. It takes about forty minutes. Then work the two audits and the thirty day plan at your own pace. Most of the fixes take an afternoon. None of them require a developer.

WHO THIS IS FOR

The owner or operator of a local business that lives or dies by being found. Trades and home services, clinics and practices, salons and studios, shops, restaurants, agencies, and anyone whose next customer is searching right now and choosing between you and three other names.

WHAT YOU WILL WALK AWAY WITH

- ☐ A clear picture of the two ways customers find you in 2026, and where you are currently invisible.
- ☐ A scored audit of how citable you are to AI answer engines, with the exact fixes.
- ☐ A field tested checklist for your Google Business Profile, the single highest leverage local asset you own.
- ☐ Copy and paste templates: an answer shaped About section, a Google description, three review request scripts, and five Q&A seeds.
- ☐ A thirty day plan that turns all of it into a habit, and a simple way to tell if it is working.

One honest note up front. Nobody controls the algorithms, and anyone who promises you a number one spot is selling you something. What you can control is being complete, consistent, and genuinely useful to the systems that decide. That is what this guide makes you. Do the work inside and you will be found by more of the people already looking.

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You now have two front doors

For twenty years, being found meant one thing: ranking on Google. Ten blue links, and a race to the top of them. That world is not gone, but it is no longer the whole game. In 2026 the person looking for you does one of two things. They search Google, where a map of three local businesses now sits above those links. Or they ask an assistant. They open ChatGPT, or Perplexity, or the AI answer that Google itself now prints at the top of the page, and they type who is the best plumber near me, or which bookkeeper should I call, and they read the answer.

Both of those are front doors to your business. Most local businesses have one propped open and the other one locked without realizing it. The good news is that the work to open both doors overlaps almost completely, and you can finish it this month.

43%

of Google searches now show an AI Overview, up from around 15% a year earlier.

Similarweb, via Search Engine Land. Directional estimate.

2.5B+

messages a day sent to ChatGPT. Many ask who to hire or buy from.

OpenAI, via Search Engine Land, 2026.

38%

of AI cited pages also rank in Google's top ten, down from 76% seven months earlier.

Ahrefs, 4M citation URLs, via ALM Corp, 2026.

Read that last number twice, because it is the whole reason this guide has two parts. Being at the top of Google no longer guarantees the AI names you, and being named by the AI no longer requires you to be at the top of Google. They have come apart. If you only chase Google rank, you can be page one and still absent from the answer the AI reads aloud. If you only chase AI mentions, you can be quoted by ChatGPT and still lose the customer who opened Google Maps. You need both doors open. Part one opens the AI door. Part two opens the Google door. Neither takes money. Both take an afternoon of the unglamorous work your competitors have not done.

OI

PART ONE

Get found on AI

How to become the business ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google's AI actually name when someone asks who to call.

How AI decides who to name

An answer engine is not guessing. When someone asks it for a recommendation, it does something close to what a careful assistant would do: it searches, it reads a handful of sources, and it repeats what those sources say clearly and consistently. If your business is easy to read and consistently described across the web, you are easy to name. If your information is thin, buried, or contradictory, you are skipped, even if you are the best in town.

Three things are happening under the hood, and understanding them tells you exactly what to fix.

1

It retrieves

The model pulls a set of web pages that seem relevant to the question: your site, your Google profile, directories, review sites, local news. If you are not present in the places it looks, you are not in the running.

2

It reads for facts

It extracts the plain facts: what you do, where, for whom, what makes you different, whether people vouch for you. Pages that state these plainly get quoted. Pages that hide them behind vague slogans get ignored.

3

It weighs consistency and trust

If your name, address, and phone match everywhere, and reviews back up your claims, the model trusts the picture and names you with confidence. If the details conflict, it hedges or leaves you out.

So the job is not to trick the machine. The job is to be the clearest, most consistent, most obviously credible answer to the question your customer is asking. The next page turns that into seven concrete signals.

The seven signals that make you citable

Work down this list, ordered from highest leverage to lowest. Each is a lever you control.

1

A page that answers the question in plain words

State in one sentence what you do, for whom, and where. Machines quote a plain sentence like that. They cannot quote a hero banner that says “Comfort. Delivered.”

2

Consistent name, address, phone everywhere

Your NAP, as it is called, must read identically on your site, your Google profile, and every directory. One outdated suite number or old phone number teaches the AI that your data is unreliable.

3

Presence in the sources it reads

Answer engines lean on Google Maps, directories, and review sites. A complete Google Business Profile is the most cited local source, and part two builds it.

4

Reviews that describe what you actually do

Reviews are proof the model can read. A review that says “fixed our AC in one visit” teaches it what to name you for. Volume matters, but specific beats generic.

5

Structured data on your site

A small code block called schema tells search systems, in their own language, that you are a LocalBusiness with these hours, address, and phone. Invisible to visitors, highly legible to machines. Ask your site manager to add LocalBusiness schema, or fill your builder’s SEO fields.

6

Specific, quotable detail

Name your service area by town. List services by their real names. State your years in business, certifications, and guarantee. Specifics are what an AI lifts word for word. Vagueness gives it nothing to hold.

7

You are not accidentally blocking the crawlers

Some sites quietly block AI crawlers in robots.txt, or hide their text inside images. If an answer engine cannot read your page, none of the above matters. Confirm crawlers are allowed and your facts are real text.

The quiet truth about being cited. There is no submission form and no fee. You become citable by being the clearest, most consistent answer on the open web. Every signal above is something your competitors could do and mostly have not.

Structure your site so AI can read it

An answer engine reads your site in seconds and moves on. A handful of structural choices decide whether it leaves with clear facts to quote or with nothing. None of these need a redesign.

1

A homepage that states the plain answer up high

Put the one sentence version of what you do, for whom, and where near the top, in real text. It anchors every system that reads the page.

2

One page per core service

Give each main service its own page, titled for the service and the town: Water heater repair in [town]. Specific pages get matched to specific questions.

3

A real FAQ page

Answer the questions customers actually ask, in plain question and answer form. Answer engines lift those pairs almost word for word. One of the highest leverage pages you can add.

4

Headings that say what the section is

Use real headings that describe the content, not Welcome or Our Story. Headings are signposts the crawler follows.

5

Schema on every page, FAQ schema on the FAQ

Add LocalBusiness schema sitewide and FAQPage schema on your FAQ. Most builders have a field for it, or your site manager adds it in minutes.

6

Fast, mobile, and linked together

If it loads slow or breaks on a phone, both Google and the AI step back. Link your pages to each other so every one gets found.

The rule of thumb. If a stranger could not learn what you do, where, and for whom in ten seconds on your site, neither can a machine. Write for the stranger and the machine follows.

Get indexed: Google Search Console

None of the last two pages matter if Google has not actually indexed your site. Google Search Console is the free tool that confirms it has, shows you what is missing, and reveals the real searches bringing you visitors. Ten minutes to set up, once.

1

Add your property

Go to search.google.com/search-console and add your site. Choose Domain to cover every version at once, or URL prefix for the simplest path.

2

Verify you own it

The console walks you through it. Most site builders have a one click verify, or you add a small DNS record or file. You do this once.

3

Submit your sitemap

Under Sitemaps, submit yoursite.com/sitemap.xml so Google has a map of every page. Most builders generate this file for you.

4

Confirm your key pages are indexed

Open the Pages report. Your home, service, and FAQ pages should read Indexed. Anything Excluded is invisible on Google until fixed.

5

Push anything missing

Use URL Inspection on an important page, then Request Indexing to nudge Google to fetch it sooner.

SEARCH CONSOLE SETUP CHECKLIST

- ☐ Property added and ownership verified.
- ☐ Sitemap submitted and showing Success.
- ☐ Home, service, and FAQ pages all reading Indexed.
- ☐ Performance report checked for the queries already finding me.

Worksheet: your AI citability scorecard

Check every box that is honestly true today. Every unchecked box is a fix, and the fixes are on the pages you just read. Come back and re check after your thirty days.

SCORE YOURSELF • ONE POINT EACH

- ☐ My site states in one plain sentence what I do, for whom, and where.
- ☐ My name, address, and phone are identical on my site and my Google profile.
- ☐ I have a Google Business Profile and it is claimed and verified.
- ☐ I have at least ten reviews, and several describe the specific job I did.
- ☐ My site has LocalBusiness structured data, or my builder's SEO fields are filled in.
- ☐ I have a services page per service and a real FAQ page, in real text.
- ☐ My site is added and verified in Google Search Console, sitemap submitted.
- ☐ I name my service area by town, and my services by their real names.
- ☐ Nothing on my site blocks AI crawlers, and my key facts are text, not images.

8–9

Strong. You are already citable. Keep reviews fresh and revisit quarterly.

0–7

Normal, and fixable this month. Start at the top of the list; the early signals move the most.

TEST IT YOURSELF IN TWO MINUTES

Open ChatGPT or Perplexity and ask it, in a fresh chat, the exact question a customer would: *who is a good [what you do] in [your town]*? Note whether it names you, a competitor, or hedges. Write today's answer in the margin. After your thirty days, ask again. That before and after is the only scoreboard that matters.

Template: the answer shaped About section

Paste this onto your About page or the footer of your home page and fill in the brackets with real specifics. It is written the way an answer engine likes to read: plain facts, in order, quotable. Keep it as real text, never inside an image.

COPY • PASTE • FILL THE BRACKETS

[Business name] is a [type of business] serving [town] and the surrounding [area / county].

We help [who: e.g. homeowners, small clinics, restaurants] with [main services, by their real names, comma separated].

We have been in business since [year]. [Certification, license, or credential.]
[Your guarantee or promise in one sentence.]

Call [phone] or visit us at [full address]. Hours: [days and times].

WHY THIS WORKS

Every sentence answers a question a customer or a machine would ask, in the order they ask it. What are you, where, for whom, what exactly do you do, why should I trust you, and how do I reach you. There is no cleverness to get in the way. When an answer engine builds its reply, this is the paragraph it can quote without guessing.

Do this too. Put the same core facts in your Google Business Profile description, word for word where it fits. Consistency across your site and your profile is signal number two doing its job.

02

PART TWO

Get found on Google

Your Google Business Profile is the highest leverage free asset your local business owns. Here is how to make it win the map.

What the map actually weighs

When someone searches for a local service, Google shows a map with three businesses pinned above the regular results. That block is called the map pack, and for a local business it is the most valuable real estate on the internet. Google has said plainly what decides who lands there. Three things.

1

Relevance

How well your profile matches what was searched. This is why your categories, services, and description have to name what you actually do, specifically. Relevance is mostly in your control.

2

Distance

How close you are to the searcher. You cannot move your building, but you can set your service area correctly so Google knows the towns you cover.

3

Prominence

How well known and trusted you are. This is reviews, activity, consistent information across the web, and a complete profile. Prominence is where the afternoon of work pays off, because most competitors leave it half done.

You cannot change distance, and relevance is a one time setup. That leaves prominence as the lever you pull again and again. The rest of part two is a checklist for relevance and a rhythm for prominence.

First, claim it. Search your business name on Google. If a profile exists that you have never logged into, claim it at google.com/business. An unclaimed or unverified profile is the most common reason a real, good business is invisible on the map.

The completeness checklist

A complete profile outranks a half filled one, every time. Google rewards completeness because a full profile is a better answer for its users. Work down this list inside your Google Business Profile and check off each field.

WORKSHEET • YOUR PROFILE AUDIT

- ☐ Business name is your real name, with no extra keywords stuffed in. Google penalizes that.
- ☐ Primary category is the most accurate one. This is the single biggest relevance lever.
- ☐ Every applicable secondary category is added.
- ☐ Full address, or a correctly set service area if you go to customers.
- ☐ Phone number matches your site exactly.
- ☐ Website link is present and correct.
- ☐ Hours are set, including special hours for holidays.
- ☐ Business description is written and uses the facts from your About template.
- ☐ Every service you offer is listed by name, with a short description each.
- ☐ Attributes are set: identity, amenities, accessibility, payment types.
- ☐ At least ten photos: exterior, interior, team, work in progress, finished results.
- ☐ Logo and a cover photo that looks professional at thumbnail size.

Every unchecked box is a reason Google shows a more complete competitor instead of you. None of these take money. Most take minutes.

Reviews, photos, posts, and questions

Completeness gets you eligible. Activity gets you chosen. These four habits are the prominence engine, and they double as fuel for the AI door from part one.

REVIEWS • THE STRONGEST SINGLE SIGNAL

Ask every satisfied customer, every time, while the good feeling is fresh. A steady trickle of recent reviews beats a big pile from two years ago. Respond to all of them, the glowing and the critical, in a calm professional voice. Specific reviews that name the job you did are worth the most, because both Google and the AI read them as proof.

PHOTOS • KEEP THEM COMING

Add a few new photos every month. Real ones, from real jobs. Fresh photos signal an active business and give the profile more for Google to show. Blurry or stock photos do the opposite.

POSTS • A SMALL SIGN OF LIFE

Use the posts feature to share an offer, an update, or a recent job, even just monthly. It is a low cost signal that the business is awake and tended.

QUESTIONS • SEED YOUR OWN

The Q&A section lets anyone ask, and anyone answer. Get ahead of it: post the real questions customers ask and answer them yourself, from your business account. You control the framing and you feed both Google and the AI clean, quotable facts.

The compounding effect. Every review, photo, and answer you add is read twice: once by Google deciding your map rank, and once by the answer engines deciding whether to name you. One habit, two front doors.

Your social profiles count too

Google and the answer engines both read your social profiles. A complete, consistent set of them is another group of trusted sources describing your business correctly. Incomplete or contradictory ones do the opposite.

1

Claim the ones your customers use

Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn at a minimum. Add YouTube, TikTok, or Nextdoor where your customers actually are. An unclaimed profile is a gap in your story.

2

Same name, address, phone, and link everywhere

Your NAP and website link must match your Google profile and your site exactly, on every account. Consistency is the whole signal.

3

Put the plain answer in every bio

Use the one sentence version of what you do, for whom, and where, and link straight to your site. Machines read bios too.

4

Stay active enough to look open

A profile last touched two years ago reads as a closed business. A post now and then keeps you looking alive.

CONSISTENCY CHECKLIST • ACROSS EVERY PROFILE

- ☐ Exact same business name on every platform.
- ☐ Same address, phone, and website link everywhere.
- ☐ Plain answer sentence in each bio, linking to my site.
- ☐ No dead or abandoned profiles pointing at old information.

Going deeper. If your profiles need a full makeover with done for you bios, banners, and a fix checklist, that is exactly what our Instant Fix kit is built for.

Templates you can use today

GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE DESCRIPTION

[Business name] provides [services] to [who] in [town and service area]. In business since [year], we are known for [the one thing customers thank you for]. [Certification or guarantee.] Call [phone] to [book, get a quote, schedule].

REVIEW REQUEST • TEXT MESSAGE

Hi [name], thanks again for choosing us for [the job]. If you have a moment, a quick Google review helps our small business more than you know. Here is the link: [your review link]. Thank you!

REVIEW REQUEST • IN PERSON, SAY IT OUT LOUD

"If you were happy with how this went, the best thing you could do for us is leave a quick Google review. I'll text you the link right now so it's easy."

FIVE Q&A SEEDS • POST AND ANSWER THESE YOURSELF

1. What areas do you serve? → [list your towns]
2. How much does [common job] cost? → [honest range + what changes it]
3. Do you offer free quotes or estimates? → [answer]
4. How fast can you come out? → [typical response time]
5. Are you licensed and insured? → [yes, license number]

Grab your review link inside your Google Business Profile under the Ask for reviews or Get more reviews option. Shorten it once and save it in your phone so asking takes five seconds.

The Review Engine: get more, respond to all

Reviews are the strongest local signal you can grow on purpose, and the cheapest. The businesses that win them do not wait; they run a small, steady engine. Here is the whole thing.

44%

more conversion from raising your average rating one full star.

WiserNotify, 2026.

73%

of people only trust reviews from the last 30 days.

WiserNotify, 2026.

88%

trust a business more when it responds to all reviews.

WiserNotify, 2026.

1

Ask everyone, at the moment of the win

Right after the job is done and they are happy, not a week later. The ask lands best while the good feeling is fresh.

2

Make it one tap

Put your short review link everywhere: a text after the job, your email signature, a QR card at the counter or on the invoice. The scripts are on the templates page.

3

Respond to every single one

Thank the happy ones by name. Stay calm and brief on the hard ones. Responding is itself a trust signal that most people read.

4

Keep them fresh

A steady trickle beats a big pile from two years ago, because most people only trust recent reviews. A few a month, forever, is the goal.

5

Turn reviews into marketing

Screenshot your best ones onto your website and socials. A real customer's words sell harder than anything you can write about yourself.

A hard review lands? Do not argue. Acknowledge it, apologize if it fits, and offer to make it right offline. A calm, human reply often wins more trust than the review costs you.

The thirty day Get Found plan

You do not need to do everything at once. Do a little each week and the whole thing is standing in a month. Fifteen to thirty minutes a day is plenty.

Wk 1 **Claim and complete.** Claim and verify your Google Business Profile. Fill every field from the completeness checklist. Set your primary category with care.

Wk 1 **Fix your facts.** Make name, address, and phone identical on your site and profile. Paste in the About and Google description templates.

Wk 1 **Index it.** Add your site to Google Search Console, submit your sitemap, and confirm you have a services page and an FAQ page.

Wk 2 **Reviews engine on.** Save your review link in your phone. Ask your last ten happy customers, then every new one, every time.

Wk 2 **Services, photos, socials.** List every service by name and upload ten photos. Claim your key social profiles and match name, address, phone, and link everywhere.

Wk 3 **Seed questions, add schema.** Post and answer the five Q&A seeds. Add LocalBusiness schema, and confirm AI crawlers are not blocked.

Wk 4 **Post once, respond to all.** Publish one profile post. Respond to every review. Keep the review asks going.

Wk 4 **Re test both doors.** Ask the AI the customer question again, and search your service on Google for the map pack. Record both.

Then keep only three habits. Ask for a review after every job. Add a few photos a month. Answer every review and question. That trickle holds your place once you have earned it.

Know if it is working

You do not need fancy tools. You need four honest checks, done once a month, written down so you can see the trend.

1

Ask the AI the customer question

Same prompt every month: who is a good [what you do] in [your town]. Track whether you are named, hedged, or missing. Trend over three months tells the story.

2

Search your service on Google

From a phone, not logged into anything unusual, search your main service plus your town. Are you in the map pack of three? Note your position.

3

Read your profile insights

Google shows you how many people found you, how they searched, and what they did. Watch calls, direction requests, and website clicks climb.

4

Ask new customers how they found you

The oldest and best metric. One sentence at intake: how did you hear about us. The answers tell you which door is working.

MONTHLY TRACKER • COPY INTO A NOTE

☐ AI names me for my main question • Y / N / hedged • _____

☐ Map pack position for my main service • _____

☐ New reviews this month • _____

☐ Profile calls / clicks / directions • _____

☐ New customers who found me online • _____

Do this on the first of every month. Three data points in, the trend is undeniable and the habit is permanent.

Glossary and sources

PLAIN ENGLISH GLOSSARY

Answer engine. A tool that replies with a written answer instead of a list of links. ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google's AI Overviews.

AI Overview. The AI written summary Google now prints above its normal results.

Map pack. The block of three local businesses shown on a small map above Google's regular results.

GBP. Google Business Profile, the free listing that controls how you show on Google Search and Maps.

NAP. Name, Address, Phone. Keeping it identical everywhere is a core trust signal.

Schema / structured data. A small code block that states your business facts in a language search systems read directly.

Search Console. Google's free tool to verify your site, submit your sitemap, and confirm which pages are indexed.

Sitemap. A file listing every page on your site so search engines can find them all.

Citation. Two meanings: a mention of your NAP on another site, and a source an AI quotes in its answer. You want both.

Prominence. Google's word for how well known and trusted you are. Built from reviews, activity, and consistency.

GEO. Generative Engine Optimization. Getting found in AI answers, the way SEO is getting found in search.

robots.txt. A file on your site that can allow or block automated readers, including AI crawlers.

SOURCES FOR THE STATISTICS IN THIS GUIDE

1. AI Overviews appearing in ~43% of Google searches, up from ~15%: Similarweb 2026 Generative AI Landscape report, reported via Search Engine Land. Treated as a directional panel estimate.
2. ChatGPT message volume of 2.5B+ per day: OpenAI, via Search Engine Land, Feb 2026.
3. Only 38% of AI cited pages also ranking in the traditional top ten, down from 76% seven months earlier; citation position distribution: Ahrefs study of 863,000 keywords and 4M citation URLs, via ALM Corp analysis, 2026.
4. Google's three local ranking factors (relevance, distance, prominence): Google Business Profile Help, Google's own published guidance.
5. Review impact (44% conversion lift per star, 73% trust only recent reviews, 88% trust businesses that respond to all): WiserNotify 2026 Google review statistics.

Search platforms change constantly. The numbers above are cited to their named sources so you can verify them. The methods in this guide are built to outlast any single number.

YOU DID THE WORK

Now go get found.

You now know more about local discoverability than most agencies charge a monthly retainer to manage. Work the plan, keep the three habits, and check both doors on the first of every month.

Want to see where you stand right now, for free?

Run the free AI visibility check at neuron-hq.com. It shows you, in minutes, whether the AI already names you or your competitor. If you would rather someone just do all of this for you, that is what we build at Neuron HQ.