Grow That Local

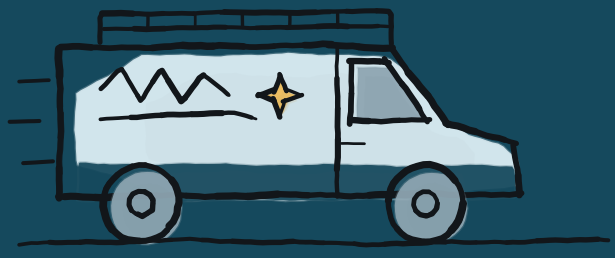
a free guide

Google's local services ads: worth it?

How they work, what you're charged for, and a ten-minute test to see if they'd pay for your trade.

For owners whose competitors show up in Google's paid local listings.

- 8 short sections in 3 parts
- 25 things you can do in the next 24 hours
- An example in every section
- Sources for every figure



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Contents

Before you start: how this guide works 3

Part 1 **How they work** 3

1 What they are and who can run them 3
2 The badge: Google Verified 4
3 What you're charged for 4
4 What decides who's first in the ad row 5

Part 2 **Will it pay for you?** 7

5 The break-even test 7
6 Which trades it suits 7
7 When to skip it 8

Part 3 **Try it for 30 days** 10

8 A 30-day trial you can measure 10

Your first 24 hours, in one list 11

If you'd rather hand it off 12

Sources 13

GTL estimates 13

Before you start

You've seen them at the very top of Google: a row of companies with star ratings, a badge and a call button. Those are Google's Local Services Ads. Unlike regular Google ads, you don't pay for clicks. You pay for leads: calls, messages and booking requests (Google Local Services Help, support.google.com).

They can be a good buy for some trades and a money pit for others. Part 1 explains how they work, using Google's own rules, checked on November 12, 2026. Part 2 gives you a break-even test with made-up numbers, a trade-by-trade view and a list of reasons to skip them. Part 3 is a 30-day trial plan if you decide to try.

Two rules we kept while writing it:

- Every Google rule has a link to Google's own page, listed at the end. When something is our judgment, we say "GTL estimate" and tell you why we think it.
- Every example is made up to show the idea, including every dollar figure in this guide. None of them are real businesses, prices or results.



Part 1

How they work

1 What they are and who can run them

The idea. Local Services Ads show at the top of Google for searches like "plumber near me." Google's page for the ads lists the US home-service trades that can run them, and every trade our Playbooks cover is on it: roofing, plumber, HVAC, house cleaning, painter, and both landscaper and lawn care (Google Local Services Ads, business.google.com).

To run them, you need a public, verified Google Business Profile, and you have to pass Google's screening for your trade (Google Local Services Help, support.google.com). So your free profile comes first. If it isn't in shape, the ads can't fix that.

Example. A made-up painter keeps seeing two competitors in the ad row above the map. They check Google's list, find "Painter" on it, and open their own Google profile first. It's verified, but it lists two services and has no photos from this year. They fix the profile before they look at the ads.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Search your main service and town on your phone. Write down who's in the ad row at the top.
- [ ] Check that your trade is on Google's list of eligible categories.
- [ ] Make sure your Google profile is verified and public, and fill in any empty fields.

2 The badge: Google Verified

The idea. The badge you see next to some businesses is now called Google Verified. Google announced in August 2025 that, from that October, one Google Verified badge would replace its older Local Services badges, including Google Screened and the badge that came with a money-back promise. That money-back program ended too (Google, August 2025, blog.google). If your website or trucks still mention an old Google badge, update them.

The badge means you passed Google's checks. What Google checks depends on the trade: state licenses, business registration and, for some trades, identity checks, background checks and insurance. Google says HVAC and plumbing get extra screening, including background checks on the people who go to homes. On average, it takes 3 to 4 weeks after you send your documents (Google Local Services Help, support.google.com).

Example. A made-up HVAC company signs up in late March, hoping to have the ads running for the first heat wave. They send their license, insurance and background-check details in the first week. The checks clear in mid-April, a month later. Next year, they'll start in February.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Read Google's screening page for your trade, so you know what it asks for.
- [ ] Put your license, insurance papers and business registration in one folder.
- [ ] If your trade needs background checks, list everyone who goes into customers' homes.
- [ ] Check your site, trucks and printed material for old Google badge wording.

3 What you're charged for

The idea. Google charges per lead, not per click (Google Local Services Help, support.google.com). The rules on that page, in plain words:

- **Charged:** an answered call, or a callback where you speak with the customer. Texts, emails and voicemails. Booking requests.
- **Missed calls:** charged only if the call comes during your business hours and the caller stays on the line for more than 20 seconds.
- **Not charged:** leads Google judges invalid or low quality at first contact, and repeat contacts from the same phone number or email in the 15 days after a lead you paid for.

- **Credits:** Google keeps checking charged leads for 30 days and may credit low-quality ones automatically. Each lead has a short feedback survey, and Google may credit leads you report as poor quality there.
- **Prices:** a lead's price depends on your location, the job type, the kind of lead and your bidding mode. Message leads usually cost less than calls.
- **Budget:** you set an average weekly budget. Some weeks can go over it, but the month won't go past your weekly budget times the average number of weeks in a month. Once you hit that, your ad stops for the rest of the month.

Example. A made-up plumber misses a call at 2pm on a Tuesday while under a sink. The caller waits 30 seconds, then hangs up. That's a charged lead, and nobody spoke to the customer. The plumber forwards the ad line to the office during working hours, so someone always picks up.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Decide who answers ad calls during your business hours, every hour.
- [ ] Set the hours you'll really answer, not the hours you'd like to.
- [ ] Decide the most you could spend in a month without worrying, before you sign up.

4 What decides who's first in the ad row

The idea. Google ranks the ads through an auction that weighs your bid and the quality of your profile (Google Local Services Help, support.google.com). Quality, in Google's words, includes your rating, number of reviews, average response time, high-quality photos and the checks you've passed. How likely you are to get a lead counts too, and Google says missed calls can count against your responsiveness. The search itself matters: the service asked for, the time and the location.

So two things you already work on for your free profile, reviews and answering fast, also decide your place in the ads. A company with more reviews that answers every call can bid the same as you, or less, and still sit above you.

Example. A made-up roofer and a competitor bid about the same. The competitor has 90 reviews and answers within a minute. The roofer has 25 reviews and lets calls go to voicemail during tear-offs. The competitor shows first most of the time. The roofer puts the office manager on the ad line and starts asking every customer for a review.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Count your reviews and write down your star average.
- [ ] Time how long it takes you to call back a missed call today.
- [ ] Upload ten clear, recent job photos to your Google profile.

or we can do it for you

Free sample: Your first 10 requests sent

Review requests is $100 a month, with a 7-day full refund.

Review requests: growthatlocal.com/services/reviews



Part 2

Will it pay for you?

5 The break-even test

The idea. One number tells you if the ads pay: what it costs you to get one booked job. Work it out like this:

1. **Cost per booked job** = what you pay per lead ÷ the share of leads you book. If one in three leads books, divide by one third, which is the same as multiplying by three.
2. **Profit per job** = the job price minus materials, labor and anything else the job costs you. Use profit, not the price.
3. If profit per job is bigger than cost per booked job, the ads pay. If not, they don't, however many leads you get.

You won't know your real lead price or booking rate until you try. Section 8 shows how to find out on a small budget. Our free Google Ads calculator runs a similar test for regular Google ads. To see what a regular Google Ads click costs, read What a Click Costs: Google Ads Prices for 70 Local Trades, 2026, or the city-by-city guide for roofers, landscapers, plumbers, HVAC companies, house cleaners and painters.

Example (sample numbers). A made-up plumber pays $40 per lead and books one in three. That's $120 per booked job. Their average service call is $380, and after parts, labor and the van, $150 of it is profit. Each booked job leaves them $30. Thin, but it pays, and a water heater job now and then makes it worth more.

A made-up roofer pays $90 per lead and books one in ten, because many callers only want a quote for insurance. That's $900 per booked job. A full replacement leaves $3,500 of profit, so those pay well. A small repair leaves $250, so those lose money. The roofer turns off the repair job type in their ad settings and keeps replacements on.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Write down your profit on your three most common jobs, after materials and labor.
- [ ] Look at last month's calls and count how many of every ten turned into a booked job.
- [ ] Work out the most you could pay per lead and still make money on each job type.

6 Which trades it suits

The idea. The ads tend to work best for urgent jobs with a good profit, where the customer calls the first trustworthy name they see. They work less well where the first job is small and the money comes from repeat visits, unless you count the repeat visits. Our free customer value calculator shows what one

customer is worth to you over time.

Here's how it tends to look for each trade:

Trade	Why it can work	Watch out for
Plumber	Urgent calls (leaks, no hot water); Google's extra screening for plumbers answers the stranger-in-the-house worry	Missed calls during business hours still cost you
HVAC	No heat or no cooling is urgent; extra screening, like plumbers	Leads spike in heat waves and cold snaps, so watch the monthly cap
Roofer	Big profit on replacements; storm leads	Many quote-only and insurance shoppers; turn off job types that don't pay
Painter	Good profit per job; buyers want a vetted pro in their home	Long decisions, so leads only pay if you follow up quotes
House cleaning	A client who stays is worth a lot over a year	The first clean is small; judge the ads on clients who stay, not on one clean
Landscaper and lawn care	Weekly mowing customers stay for seasons	Low price per visit and slow winters; lower the budget when the season ends

Example. A made-up house cleaner's first leads look like a loss: each new client costs more than the first clean brings in. Then they count the clients who stay. Most are on a two-week schedule, so after a few months each one has paid for their lead many times over. The cleaner keeps the ads on and tracks clients who stay past three cleans.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Find your trade in the table and read the "watch out" column.
- [ ] If you're a cleaner or landscaper, work out what a customer who stays a year is worth.
- [ ] If you're a roofer or painter, decide which job types you'd turn off.

7 When to skip it

The idea. The ads aren't right for everyone, or not yet. Skip them, or wait, if any of these is true:

- **You can't answer quickly.** Missed calls can hurt your place in the ads, and a missed call in business hours can still be charged (Google Local Services Help, support.google.com; Google Local Services Help (support.google.com)).
- **You're booked out for weeks.** More leads you can't serve are money spent on leads you turn away.

- **Your profile is weak.** Few reviews or a low rating puts you lower in the ad row, so you pay for a spot customers skip past.
- **You can't pass the screening yet.** Get your license, insurance and paperwork in order first.
- **Your profit per job is below your cost per booked job.** No amount of leads fixes that (section 5).
- **Your free Google profile isn't working yet.** The free map listing comes first. Our guide Which Marketing to Buy First explains the order.

Example. A made-up landscaper is booked solid from April to June and has 12 reviews. They skip the ads this spring and spend the time asking every customer for a review. In August, with 40 reviews and room on the schedule for fall cleanups, they try the ads for a month.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Go down the list and tick every line that's true for you today.
- [ ] If you ticked any, fix that first and set a reminder to look at the ads again in three months.
- [ ] If you ticked none, read section 8.

or we can do it for you

Free sample: A profile check-up with 10+ fixes

Google Business Profile is $200 a month, with a 7-day full refund.

Google Business Profile: growthatlocal.com/services/google-business-profile



Part 3

Try it for 30 days

8 A 30-day trial you can measure

The idea. The only way to know your real lead price and booking rate is to try. Start with a budget you're comfortable losing, and track every lead by hand. After 30 days, you'll have your own numbers for the test in section 5.

Track five things for each lead: the date, call or message, the job asked about, whether it booked, and the profit if it did. Use the feedback survey on each lead to report bad ones, since Google may credit leads you report as poor quality (Google Local Services Help, support.google.com).

Example (sample numbers). A made-up HVAC company sets a weekly budget of $150. Over 30 days, they get 18 leads and spend $620. They book 7 jobs. That's about $89 per booked job. Their average repair leaves $210 of profit, so the ads pay. They report two leads that were sales calls and keep the budget the same for another month before raising it.

Do it in 24 hours

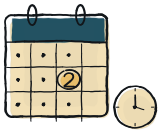
- [ ] Make a tracking sheet with five columns: date, call or message, job, booked, profit.
- [ ] Pick a weekly budget you'd be fine losing for one month.
- [ ] Put a reminder in your phone for 30 days after your ads start, to run the section 5 test with real numbers.

or we can do it for you

Free sample: Your first report card, this month

The monthly report card is free.

Monthly report card: growthatlocal.com/services/report-card



Your first 24 hours, in one list

If you only do four things this week, do these:

- [ ] Check your trade is eligible and your Google profile is verified and complete (section 1).
- [ ] Gather your license, insurance and registration in one folder (section 2).
- [ ] Work out your profit per job and your booking rate from last month's calls (section 5).
- [ ] Go down the skip list. If nothing on it is true, plan a 30-day trial (sections 7 and 8).



If you'd rather hand it off

Grow That Local doesn't sell or run Local Services Ads. We do the work that decides whether they pay: a complete Google profile, a steady flow of reviews and a site that turns calls into jobs. Each service starts with a free sample, so you see the work before you pay.

Best fit for this guide: Google Business Profile. Free sample: a profile check-up with 10+ fixes. Google Business Profile is $200 a month, with a 7-day full refund.

Google Business Profile — **$200 a month · 7-day full refund**
Show up in the map when neighbors search for what you do. Free sample: a profile check-up with 10+ fixes.

Websites — **from $1 a month · 7-day full refund**
A fast, good-looking site that turns visitors into calls. Free sample: a preview of your new site.

Review requests — **$100 a month · 7-day full refund**
More 5-star reviews, without the awkward asking. Free sample: your first 10 requests sent.

Social media posts — **$200 a month · 7-day full refund**
Fresh posts every week, made from your real job photos. Free sample: two weeks of posts, ready to go.

Email newsletter — **$50 a month · 7-day full refund**
Stay top of mind, so past customers call you first. Free sample: your first newsletter, written.

SEO — **$400 a month · 7-day full refund**
Climb Google for the searches that bring in jobs. Free sample: a ranking check and 10 fixes.

Win-back texts — **$100 a month · 7-day full refund**
Bring past customers back for their next job. Free sample: your first 25 customers texted.

Neighborhood postcard — **$400 a month · 7-day full refund**
Your ad in mailboxes across nice neighborhoods. Free sample: your ad, designed and shown on the card.

Monthly report card — **free**
See how you stack up against local competitors. Free sample: your first report card, this month.

Text us at (423) 924-2014, or start at growthatlocal.com/start.

Sources

This guide has no statistics. Every dollar figure is a made-up example. Every Google rule comes from Google's own pages, each checked on 2026-11-12:

- Google Local Services Help, "How leads work" (charged per lead; what's charged and not; the 20-second missed-call rule; 15-day repeats; 30-day credits and the feedback survey; what sets lead prices; weekly budget and monthly cap): support.google.com (sections 3, 7 and 8)
- Google Local Services Help, "About ad rankings" (auction of bid and profile quality; rating, reviews, response time, photos and checks; missed calls and responsiveness): support.google.com (sections 4 and 7)
- Google Local Services Help, "Business screening and verification requirements" (verified profile required; checks by trade; extra screening for HVAC and plumbing; 3 to 4 weeks on average): support.google.com (sections 1 and 2)
- Google Local Services Ads page, US eligible home-service categories: business.google.com (section 1)
- Google, August 20, 2025, announcing the Google Verified badge replacing the older Local Services badges and the money-back program: blog.google (section 2)

GTL estimates

These are our own judgment, not measured facts:

1. The trade-by-trade view (section 6). Reasoning: the ads charge per lead whatever the job is worth, so they favor urgent jobs with good profit, and they only pay for small first jobs when the customer comes back.
2. Being booked out is a reason to wait (section 7). Reasoning: you pay for each lead whether or not you can take the job, so leads you turn away are pure cost.
3. A weak profile is a reason to wait (section 7). Reasoning: Google ranks the ads partly on rating and number of reviews, so a weak profile pays for spots lower in the row, where fewer people call.
4. A stronger profile can beat a higher bid (section 4). Reasoning: Google weighs bid and profile quality together, so better reviews and faster replies make up for part of a lower bid.
5. Start with a 30-day trial on a budget you'd be fine losing (section 8). Reasoning: lead prices and booking rates vary by town and trade, so your own numbers after a month beat any average.

want it done for you?

Every part of this guide is something we do.

Each one starts with a free sample, so you see the work before you pay. Text us at (423) 924-2014 or start at growthatlocal.com/start.

Grow *That* Local