Grow That Local

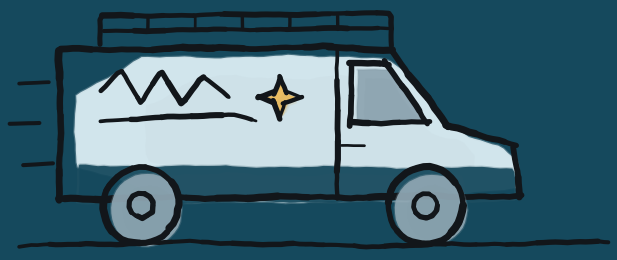
*a free guide*

# Is plumbing growing? The 2026 numbers for plumbers

**How many plumbing companies and plumbers the US has, how fast that has grown in ten years, where it grew and where it shrank, and what bigger competitors mean for your marketing.**

For plumbing business owners planning ahead.

- 13 short sections in 6 parts
- 39 things you can do in the next 24 hours
- An example in every section
- Sources for every figure



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# Before you start

More vans with big logos, more ads for cheap drain cleaning, more names above yours in the Google map. We wanted to know what's really changed. So we went to the government's own counts.

We used three free public sources:

- **Census County Business Patterns** counts every plumbing business location with paid employees, and how many people work there, every year. The newest year is 2023 (Census Bureau, census.gov).
- **Census Nonemployer Statistics** counts businesses with no paid employees, mostly one-person firms. The newest year is 2024 (Census Bureau, census.gov).
- **Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Projections** says how many plumber jobs the government expects in 2035 (BLS, bls.gov).

We pulled the US, all 50 states and DC, and 10 Southeast metro areas. We also added our own Google search data to show demand.

**One thing to know first.** The Census counts plumbers and heating and air-conditioning contractors together, under one industry code: 238220, Plumbing, Heating, and Air-Conditioning Contractors. There's no separate plumbing-only count. So every business count in this report includes HVAC companies, and many shops do both. The BLS outlook in section 8 is for plumbers alone.

The headline findings:

- The US had 111,207 plumbing, heating and air-conditioning businesses with paid employees in 2023, up 7% in five years. All businesses grew 6%.
- Their payroll grew almost twice as fast: 1,214,761 people, up 14% in five years. Shops are getting bigger.
- Firms with 50 or more employees grew 20% from 2018 to 2023. Firms with fewer than 5 grew 6%.
- The count fell in 8 states, including New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Maryland.
- One-person plumbing and HVAC businesses are rare compared with other trades: 1.6 for every business with staff.
- The government projects plumber jobs will grow 7% from 2025 to 2035, "much faster than average". That's a projection, not a fact.

The limits, in plain words:

- **Census counts lag.** The newest business counts are for 2023. Nothing here shows 2025 or 2026.
- **Two kinds of business.** County Business Patterns counts locations with paid employees. One-person businesses are counted separately (section 7).
- **Plumbing and HVAC share one count,** as above.
- **Small cities have small numbers.** Montgomery had 100 plumbing and HVAC businesses in 2023.
- **Projections are not facts.** We say "projected" every time.

Every example is made up to show the idea. Where a checklist says to text customers, text only people who've agreed to hear from you by text, and stop when they ask. Our free texting rules guide has the details.



*Part 1*

# How big plumbing is

## 1 How many plumbing businesses and workers there are

**The idea.** In 2023, the US had 111,207 plumbing, heating and air-conditioning business locations with paid employees. Together they had 1,214,761 people on the payroll in March (Census County Business Patterns 2023, census.gov). That's about 33 for every 100,000 people.

| Measure | 2013 | 2018 | 2023 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Plumbing and HVAC businesses with paid employees | 93,508 | 103,616 | 111,207 |
| People on their payroll | 840,511 | 1,067,543 | 1,214,761 |
| Employees per business | 9.0 | 10.3 | 10.9 |
| People in the US per business | 3,380 | 3,154 | 3,029 |

Source: Census County Business Patterns, 2013, 2018 and 2023; population from Census population estimates.

Two rows tell the story. Businesses grew slowly: one for every 3,154 people in 2018, one for every 3,029 in 2023. Employees per business grew faster, from 9.0 to 10.9 in ten years. The number of shops is creeping up. The size of shops is jumping.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber in a town of 45,000 does the sum. At the national rate, that's about 15 plumbing and HVAC businesses with staff. They count 11 in the map, but three of them run ten or more vans. Fewer competitors than average, but bigger ones.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Write down your town's population.
- [ ] Divide it by 3,029. That's how many plumbing and HVAC businesses an average US town that size has.
- [ ] Search "plumber near me" on your phone. Count the businesses, and note which ones run big fleets.

## 2 Ten years of growth, year by year

**The idea.** Plumbing and HVAC businesses grew 19% from 2013 to 2023, a bit ahead of all businesses (12%). Payroll grew 45% in the same ten years (Census County Business Patterns, census.gov).

| Year | Plumbing and HVAC businesses | People on payroll |
|---|---|---|
| 2013 | 93,508 | 840,511 |
| 2014 | 95,201 | 882,906 |
| 2015 | 97,181 | 933,870 |
| 2016 | 98,434 | 992,233 |
| 2017 | 102,455 | 1,015,585 |
| 2018 | 103,616 | 1,067,543 |
| 2019 | 103,359 | 1,099,138 |
| 2020 | 104,367 | 1,116,145 |
| 2021 | 106,854 | 1,124,239 |
| 2022 | 109,601 | 1,176,759 |
| 2023 | 111,207 | 1,214,761 |

Source: Census County Business Patterns, 2013 to 2023. Industry code 238220 means the same thing in every year shown.

The count dipped once, in 2019. Payroll never dipped. That's the pattern: steady demand, more work per shop, and fewer new shops than in trades like roofing or landscaping.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber has seen the same eight competitors for years. The table explains why it feels different anyway: each competitor has more trucks and more techs than they did. Same names, bigger shops.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Write down your three biggest local competitors.
- [ ] Count their vans or techs now, from their website or Google photos, and guess what they had five years ago.
- [ ] Write down what you can offer that a big shop can't, such as the owner on the call.



*Part 2*

# Where plumbing is growing

## 3 The fastest and slowest growing states

**The idea.** The West and northern New England grew fastest. The Northeast corridor and the northern Plains shrank. Of the 50 states with at least 100 plumbing and HVAC businesses in 2018, 8 had fewer in 2023 (Census County Business Patterns, 2018 and 2023, census.gov).

| | State | Change, 2018 to 2023 | Businesses, 2023 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fastest | Arizona | +22% | 2,567 |
| | Idaho | +22% | 904 |
| | New Hampshire | +21% | 776 |
| | Utah | +19% | 1,443 |
| | Maine | +18% | 781 |
| Slowest | Wyoming | -6% | 315 |
| | Maryland | -4% | 1,986 |
| | Massachusetts | -3.5% | 3,069 |
| | New Jersey | -3% | 3,454 |
| | North Dakota | -2% | 336 |

Source: Census County Business Patterns, 2018 and 2023, industry 238220 (plumbing and HVAC together). Only states with at least 100 businesses in 2018 are ranked. The other three states that shrank were New York, Illinois and Nebraska.

In the six states around our metro areas: Tennessee +17%, Arkansas +17%, Alabama +17%, Kentucky +10%, Oklahoma +7% and Mississippi +3%. The US grew 7%.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber in Tennessee sees +17%, more than twice the US rate. New shops are opening around them, often HVAC companies adding plumbing. They decide to make their Google profile and reviews the best in town before the newcomers catch up.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Find your state in the table, or in the full list in our data report.
- [ ] If your state grew more than 7%, expect new names in the map next year.
- [ ] If it shrank, your competitors are fewer but bigger. Read section 6.

## 4 How crowded your state is

**The idea.** We counted plumbing and HVAC businesses per 100,000 people, and Google searches per business, to see where demand is spread thinnest.

Most businesses per 100,000 people: Montana (63), Maine (56), New Hampshire (55), Wyoming (54) and Vermont (47). Fewest: West Virginia (23), Mississippi (24), Ohio (25) and Michigan (26). The US average is 33 (Census County Business Patterns 2023, census.gov and Census population estimates (census.gov)).

Now demand. Across the US, people make about 2,090,376 plumbing searches a month on the searches we track. That's about 19 a month for every plumbing and HVAC business. Since that count includes HVAC shops, the real number per plumbing shop is higher.

| State | Plumbing searches a month per business |
|---|---|
| US | 18.8 |
| Tennessee | 20.9 |
| Oklahoma | 18.9 |
| Mississippi | 15.2 |
| Kentucky | 15.1 |
| Alabama | 14.8 |
| Arkansas | 11.9 |

Source: GTL analysis of Google Ads search estimates, November 2022 to September 2026, divided by Census County Business Patterns 2023 plumbing and HVAC businesses. Searches aren't jobs.

The most searches per business are in Ohio (26.6), Virginia (23.7), Oregon (23.6) and Indiana (22.1). The fewest are in Montana (5.8), North Dakota (7.6) and Wyoming (8.3).

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber works in Arkansas, at about 12 searches per business, well under the US. Google alone won't fill the week. They put more effort into real estate agents and property managers who send repeat work.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Find your state in the table or the lists above.
- [ ] If it's below 18.8, build referral partners: agents, property managers, home inspectors.
- [ ] If it's above, make sure every call gets answered, nights included.

## 5 The 10 Southeast metro areas

**The idea.** Plumbing and HVAC grew in 9 of the 10 metro areas we checked. Huntsville grew fastest, +35%. Louisville was the only one that shrank.

These are Census metro areas: the city plus the counties around it, using the same counties in both years.

| Metro area | Plumbing and HVAC businesses, 2018 to 2023 | Change | People on payroll, 2023 | Per 100,000 people | All businesses, change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Huntsville | 127 to 171 | +35% | 2,100 | 32 | +11% |
| Little Rock | 254 to 305 | +20% | 3,329 | 40 | +5% |
| Nashville | 491 to 589 | +20% | 9,440 | 28 | +15% |
| Montgomery | 82 to 98 | +20% | 1,157 | 25 | +4% |
| Birmingham | 364 to 431 | +18% | 5,374 | 36 | +5% |
| Lexington | 163 to 184 | +13% | 2,287 | 35 | +8% |
| Tulsa | 387 to 424 | +10% | 3,918 | 40 | +4% |
| Memphis | 333 to 348 | +5% | 5,311 | 26 | +2% |
| Jackson, MS | 163 to 166 | +2% | 1,719 | 27 | +3% |
| Louisville | 460 to 449 | -2% | 6,592 | 33 | +4% |

Source: Census County Business Patterns, 2018 and 2023, summed by county using the July 2023 Census metro area county lists. People on payroll is from the Census 2023 metro file. Per 100,000 people uses Census population estimates for 2023.

Tulsa and Little Rock have the most plumbing and HVAC businesses for their size, about 40 per 100,000 people. Montgomery, Memphis and Jackson have the fewest. Nashville's shops are the biggest on average: 9,440 people across 589 businesses, about 16 each.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber in Huntsville had about 126 competitors in 2018 and about 170 now. Many are HVAC shops that added plumbing. They put a page on their website for each plumbing job they want, so they show up for the plumbing searches the HVAC-first shops don't cover well.

**Do it in 24 hours**

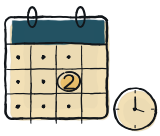
- [ ] Find your metro area in the table, or the nearest one.
- [ ] Compare its change with the "All businesses" column.
- [ ] Look up your own county in section 12 for an exact count.

*or we can do it for you*

**Free sample: A preview of your new site**

With a page for each plumbing job you want, so you can see how you'd stand out before you pay anything. Websites start at $1 a month, with a 7-day full refund.

**Websites: growthatlocal.com/services/websites**



*Part 3*

# Solo plumbers and big shops

## 6 Bigger shops are growing fastest

**The idea.** Of the 111,207 plumbing and HVAC businesses with staff in 2023, 64,871 (58%) had fewer than 5 employees (Census County Business Patterns 2023, census.gov). But the growth is at the top.

| Employees | Businesses, 2023 | Share | Change since 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fewer than 5 | 64,871 | 58% | +6% |
| 5 to 9 | 20,587 | 19% | +7% |
| 10 to 19 | 13,148 | 12% | +7% |
| 20 to 49 | 8,384 | 8% | +12% |
| 50 or more | 4,217 | 4% | +20% |

Source: Census County Business Patterns, 2018 and 2023, industry 238220.

Shops with 50 or more employees grew 20% in five years, more than three times as fast as the smallest shops. Big shops have call centers, ad budgets and fleets. A small shop can't outspend them. It can out-trust them.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber with 4 employees keeps losing water heater jobs to a 60-person company with a big ad budget. They stop bidding on the same ads and lean on what the big company can't say: "You'll get me, the owner, and the same tech every time."

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Find your row in the size table.
- [ ] Write down the one thing customers say they like about calling you instead of a big shop.
- [ ] Put that line on your home page and your Google profile description.

## 7 One-person plumbers

**The idea.** One-person shops are rarer in plumbing than in most trades. In 2024, the US had 189,085 plumbing, heating and air-conditioning businesses with no paid employees, up 9% from 2022 (Census Nonemployer Statistics 2022 and 2024, census.gov). In 2023 there were 1.6 of them for every business with staff. In landscaping it was 4.4, and in cleaning 16. The average one took in $78,607 in 2024, per the same source.

In our metro areas in 2023:

| Metro area | One-person plumbing and HVAC businesses | Per business with staff |
|---|---|---|
| Memphis | 1,014 | 2.9 |
| Jackson, MS | 452 | 2.7 |
| Nashville | 1,352 | 2.3 |
| Montgomery | 210 | 2.1 |
| Birmingham | 772 | 1.8 |
| Lexington | 312 | 1.7 |
| Little Rock | 504 | 1.6 |
| Tulsa | 651 | 1.5 |
| Huntsville | 246 | 1.4 |
| Louisville | 595 | 1.3 |

Source: Census Nonemployer Statistics 2023 and County Business Patterns 2023, Census metro areas.

The BLS says about 8% of plumbers are self-employed (BLS Employment Projections 2025-35, bls.gov).

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up solo plumber in Memphis competes with almost three other one-person shops for every company with staff. They can't promise a 30-minute arrival. So they promise something else: a set price before they start, and a text with their photo before they knock.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Put your license number, insurance and your own photo on your website and Google profile.
- [ ] Write down how you handle after-hours calls, and say it on your site.
- [ ] If you work alone, pick one solo plumber or small shop to swap overflow calls with.



*Part 4*

# The next ten years

## 8 What the government projects for plumbers

**The idea.** The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects plumber, pipefitter and steamfitter jobs will grow from 510,600 in 2025 to 545,200 in 2035. That's 7%, which the BLS calls "much faster than average": jobs overall are projected to grow 3.5% (BLS Employment Projections 2025-35, bls.gov). It expects about 42,000 openings a year, many to replace people who retire. The median plumber earned $63,800 in 2025, per the same table.

The BLS says "demand for plumbers will stem from new construction and from the need to maintain and repair plumbing systems" (BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, Plumbers, bls.gov). Most plumbers learn through an apprenticeship, per the same page.

These are projections, not facts. They count plumber jobs in any business, including builders and factories.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber can't find a licensed tech. The projection says jobs will grow faster than workers retire out. They sponsor an apprentice instead of waiting for a finished plumber to apply.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Add a "Careers" page to your website that mentions apprenticeships.
- [ ] Call your local trade school or union hall and ask how to take on an apprentice.
- [ ] Write down how many techs you'll need next winter, when freezes hit.

## 9 Demand: when and how much people search

**The idea.** Across the US, people make about 2,090,376 plumbing searches a month on the searches we track, like "plumber near me" and "water heater repair". Plumbing is one of the steadier trades. Searches peak in July, January and October, January probably because of freezes. They're quietest in June, November and May.

We don't quote whether searches went up or down from one year to the next. Google's yearly totals fall for almost every trade. That reflects how Google reports searches, and searches moving to Maps and chat assistants, not fewer customers.

Source: GTL analysis of Google Ads search estimates, November 2022 to October 2026. Our plumber busy season calendar has your region and metro area.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber in Nashville sees more shops and steady searches. They can't make it freeze, but they can be ready when it does. They write their frozen-pipe text and page in November, before the first cold snap.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Circle your area's three busiest search months.
- [ ] Write a short "what to do if a pipe bursts" page for your website.
- [ ] Compare with last year's invoices. Your own phone is the final word for your town.



*Part 5*

# What it means for your business

## 10 Bigger competitors: what to change in your marketing

**The idea.** In plumbing, the problem isn't many new shops. It's bigger ones, with call centers and ad budgets. Homeowners in a hurry pick the plumber who answers and seems safe to let into the house. Four things matter most.

- **Answer every call.** Big shops answer 24 hours a day. If you can't, text back within minutes with the shut-off step and when you can come.
- **Solve the stranger problem.** Show your face, your techs' faces, your license and your insurance. Big shops can feel faceless.
- **A page for every job and symptom.** "Water heater leaking", "sewer smell", "low water pressure". People search the problem, not the trade.
- **Reviews from every job.** Ask every customer for an honest review, and send the tech's name and photo before each visit. Strangers reading your reviews want to know who will knock.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber in Birmingham sees 431 plumbing and HVAC businesses, up from 364, and the big shops winning the ads. They write eight symptom pages, add tech photos, send each tech's name and photo before the visit, and ask every customer for an honest review. A month later they show up for searches like "water heater leaking" that the big shops' pages don't answer.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Turn on missed-call text-back with your shut-off advice.
- [ ] Add a photo of yourself and each tech to your website, with their first names.
- [ ] Write one symptom page, such as "water heater leaking".
- [ ] Text your last five customers asking for an honest review, if they've agreed to texts.

## 11 Fast-growing or shrinking: two plans

**The idea.** Read your state and metro numbers from Part 2, then pick a plan.

**If plumbing grew fast where you work** (like Huntsville, Little Rock or Nashville): many newcomers are HVAC shops adding plumbing. Own the plumbing-only jobs they don't do well: sewer lines, repipes, water heaters, gas lines. Build a page for each and get reviews that mention them.

**If your area is flat or shrinking** (like Louisville, Jackson or Memphis, or states like New Jersey and Maryland): fewer competitors, but bigger ones. Keep your past customers. Use water heater age as your calendar. Send a short email before the first freeze. Ask real estate agents to send you inspection repair lists.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber in Louisville sees the count drop from 460 to 449. Fewer shops, bigger fleets. They pull every water heater they installed 9 or more years ago and offer a check-up. Forty customers book.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Decide which plan fits your town, using sections 3 to 5.
- [ ] Pull a list of water heaters you installed 9 or more years ago.
- [ ] Call one real estate agent and offer fast quotes on inspection repair lists.

## 12 Check your own county

**The idea.** Our metro areas are wide. Your county may differ. The Census publishes the same count for every county, free, on data.census.gov (data.census.gov).

1. Open the County Business Patterns 2023 table on data.census.gov.
2. Under Geography, choose your county.
3. Under Industry, search "238220" (Plumbing, Heating, and Air-Conditioning Contractors).
4. Read "Number of establishments". For an earlier year, change the table year to 2018 and repeat.

Remember: this count includes HVAC companies. Counties with very few businesses may be left out to protect privacy.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up plumber finds 60 plumbing and HVAC businesses in their county and only 9 in the fast-growing county next door. They start running their Google profile's service area into that county.

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] Look up your county for 2023 and 2018.
- [ ] Do the same for the next county over.
- [ ] Add the less crowded county to your service area and website.

*or we can do it for you*

**Free sample: A preview of your new site**

With your photo, your techs and the symptom pages people search, ready before the first freeze. Websites start at $1 a month, with a 7-day full refund.

**Websites: growthatlocal.com/services/websites**



*Part 6*

# How we did it

## 13 What we counted, and the limits

**The idea.** These are the facts behind every number in this report.

- **Businesses with staff:** Census County Business Patterns, 2012 to 2023, industry code 238220 (Plumbing, Heating, and Air-Conditioning Contractors). Plumbing and HVAC share this code. A "business" is one location with paid employees. People on payroll are counted in the week of March 12.
- **Same code every year:** the Census code lists for 2012, 2017 and 2022 map 238220 one to one (Census NAICS concordances, census.gov), so 2013 and 2023 compare like for like.
- **Metro areas:** the counties in each Census metro area as of July 2023, used for every year. Since 2017, the Census leaves out county counts under 3 businesses, so our metro totals can run a few below the official metro figure.
- **One-person businesses:** Census Nonemployer Statistics, 2022 to 2024, industry 23822 (the same plumbing and HVAC group). The Census changed its method in 2018 and its cutoffs in 2022, so we only compare 2022 onward.
- **The outlook:** BLS Employment Projections 2025-35, for the occupation "Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters".
- **Demand:** GTL analysis of Google Ads search estimates, November 2022 to October 2026. Searches, not jobs.

Limits: the Census counts lag one to two years. Small metro numbers swing a lot. Projections can be wrong.

**Example (sample numbers).** A made-up local reporter quotes: "Plumbing, heating and air-conditioning businesses with 50 or more employees grew 20% from 2018 to 2023, according to Census County Business Patterns, as analyzed by Grow That Local."

**Do it in 24 hours**

- [ ] If you quote a figure, say it covers plumbing and HVAC together, and name the source and year.
- [ ] If you're an owner, check your county (section 12). Your own count beats ours for your town.



# Your first 24 hours, in one list

If you do these today, you'll know who you're up against and what to do about it:

- [ ] Divide your town's population by 3,029 and compare with the shops you see in the map (section 1).
- [ ] Find your state and metro area in sections 3 to 5.
- [ ] Look up your county on data.census.gov (section 12).
- [ ] Turn on missed-call text-back with your shut-off advice (section 10).
- [ ] Add your photo and your techs' photos to your site (section 10).



# Where to go next

For the whole job of getting more plumbing calls, read The Plumber Marketing Playbook. To see when your town searches for a plumber, read When Your Town Searches for a Plumber. To see what it takes to beat the shops around you on reviews, read How many reviews a plumber needs to win.

To see how plumbing compares with 24 other local trades, read Which Local Trades Are Growing: 2026.



# If you'd rather hand it off

Grow That Local does this work for plumbers every month. Each service starts with a free sample, so you see the work before you pay.

**Best fit for this guide: Websites. Free sample: a preview of your new site. Websites start at $1 a month, with a 7-day full refund.**

**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.

**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.

**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

**Every statistic above, with where it comes from:**


1. US Census Bureau, County Business Patterns, 2013 to 2023, industry 238220 Plumbing, Heating, and Air-Conditioning Contractors, for the US, every state and the counties of 10 metro areas: census.gov (data files: census.gov). (sections 1 to 7, 10 to 13)
2. US Census Bureau, County Business Patterns, all industries, same years, for the "all businesses" comparisons. (sections 2, 5)
3. US Census Bureau, Nonemployer Statistics, 2022 to 2024, industry 23822, US and metro areas; industries 56173 and 56172 for the comparison with landscaping and cleaning: census.gov (section 7)
4. US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections 2025-35, occupational projections and worker characteristics, Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters (47-2152): bls.gov (sections 7, 8)
5. US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters: bls.gov (section 8)
6. US Census Bureau, population estimates for 2013, 2018 and 2023 (states, counties and the US): census.gov (sections 1, 4, 5)
7. US Census Bureau, metro area county lists, July 2023: census.gov (section 5)
8. US Census Bureau, NAICS concordances 2022 to 2017 and 2017 to 2012: census.gov (section 13)
9. GTL analysis of Google Ads search estimates, November 2022 to October 2026: 28 plumbing searches, for the US and every state. (sections 4, 9)


**Tools cited (not statistics), checked on 2026-11-13:**


- data.census.gov, County Business Patterns 2023 table: data.census.gov (section 12)


# GTL estimates

**These are our own judgment, not measured facts:**

1. Shops are getting bigger faster than new shops are opening (sections 1, 2, 6). Reasoning: from 2013 to 2023, businesses grew 19% while payroll grew 45%, and firms with 50 or more employees grew 20% from 2018 to 2023 against 6% for the smallest.
2. Many newcomers in fast-growing metros are HVAC shops adding plumbing (sections 5, 11). Reasoning: the Census count joins the two trades, HVAC jobs are projected to grow faster than plumbing jobs (BLS 11% against 7%), and HVAC companies commonly add plumbing to keep techs busy between seasons.
3. One-person plumbers are rarer than in other trades because of licensing (section 7). Reasoning: most plumbers train through an apprenticeship and need a license to work alone, which a solo mower or cleaner doesn't.
4. A small shop can't outspend big shops, but can out-trust them (sections 6, 10). Reasoning: homeowners let a stranger into the house for plumbing, so a known face, a license and plenty of honest reviews matter more than ad reach.
5. People search the symptom, not the trade (section 10). Reasoning: our search data shows problem searches like "water heater repair" among the plumbing searches people make each month.

6. Water heaters about 9 or more years old are worth a check-up offer (section 11). Reasoning: tank water heaters wear out after years of use, and an offer before failure reaches the owner before they search in a hurry.

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