Grow That Local

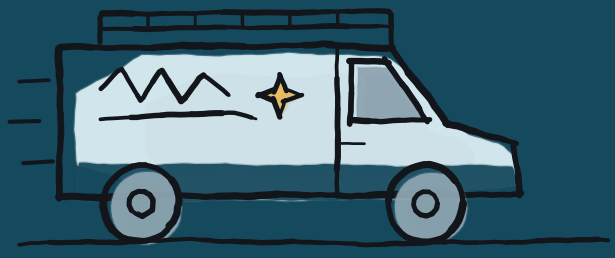
a free guide

Why the other guy shows up first on Google

Google weighs three things for the map. Here are seven you can check against the company above you, tonight.

For owners frustrated by a competitor's ranking.

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



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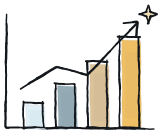
Before you start

You search for your own trade in your own town, and a company you barely know sits at the top of the map. It feels unfair. Usually there's a plain reason, and you can find it in ten minutes with their profile open next to yours.

Google says local results come down to three things: relevance, distance and prominence (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com). Part 1 explains them in plain English and shows you how to search the way customers do. Part 2 breaks them into seven things you can compare with the company above you. Part 3 puts it all on one page you can fill in within 24 hours.

Two rules we kept while writing it:

- Every number and every Google rule has a public source you can check, listed at the end. When we didn't have one, we say "GTL estimate" and tell you why we think it.
- Every example is made up to show the idea. None of them are real businesses or results.



Part 1

What Google weighs

1 Google's three things, in plain English

The idea. Google's own help page says local results are "mainly based on relevance, distance, and popularity," and it explains that last one under the name prominence (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com). In plain words:

- **Relevance:** does your profile match what they typed? Someone searching "water heater repair" matches a plumber who lists water heater repair as a service.
- **Distance:** how far you are from the person searching. If they don't share where they are, Google uses what it knows about their location.
- **Prominence:** how well known you are. Google says this includes how many websites link to you and how many reviews you have, and that more reviews and good ratings can help.

The same page says there's no way to request or pay for a better local ranking. Ads can sit above the map, but the map itself can't be bought. That's good news. Everything below is work, not money.

Example. A made-up painter searches "house painter" from their shop on the east side of town. A competitor based on the west side shows first. That evening, from a customer's driveway on the west side, the painter runs the same search and the competitor is first again, while the painter is fourth. Back at the shop the next morning, the painter is first. Neither company changed anything. The searcher moved.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Write the three words where you'll see them: relevance, distance, prominence.
- [ ] Search your main service on your phone at your shop or home, then again from a job site across town. Write down where you show up each time.
- [ ] Write down who's above you each time. You'll compare yourself with them in Part 2.

2 Search like a customer, not like the owner

The idea. The map you see from your shop isn't the map your customers see. Distance is one of Google's three things, so results change with where the searcher stands. Customers search from their homes, all over your service area, and they often type the problem, not the trade: "AC not blowing cold," "gutter cleaning near me," "move-out cleaning."

To see the real picture, search from where your customers are, with the words they use. If you can't get across town, ask a customer or friend who lives there to send you screenshots.

Example. A made-up HVAC company writes the five searches its customers really make: "AC repair," "furnace not working," "heat pump install," "HVAC company near me" and "AC repair" plus the town name. The owner runs all five from three spots: the shop, a neighborhood on the north edge, and a big subdivision 15 minutes south. They're in the top three for 6 of the 15 searches, all near the shop. In the subdivision, the same competitor is first every time.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Write the five searches customers make most for your best-paying jobs. Use their words, not trade words.
- [ ] Pick three spots in your service area: near your base, the far edge, and the neighborhood you most want to work in.
- [ ] Run all five searches from each spot, or ask someone there for screenshots.
- [ ] Make a simple grid: search, spot, your position, and who's first.

or we can do it for you

Free sample: A ranking check and 10 fixes

SEO is $400 a month, with a 7-day full refund.

SEO: growthatlocal.com/services/seo



Part 2

The seven things to check

Each section compares you with the company that beat you on your grid. Have their Google profile open next to yours.

3 How close they are to the searcher

The idea. You can't move your shop, and you shouldn't fake an address. Google's guidelines don't accept P.O. boxes, mailboxes at remote locations or virtual offices as addresses. If customers don't come to you, Google asks you to hide your address and set a service area, and it says that area shouldn't reach farther than about 2 hours of driving from your base (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com).

Distance explains a lot of rankings that feel unfair. A competitor based in the next town will often beat you there, and you'll often beat them in yours. Spend your effort on the six things below, where you can catch up.

Example. A made-up landscaper keeps losing "lawn care" in a suburb 20 minutes away to a crew based there. They stop fighting the map in that suburb. Instead, they add a page to their site about their work there, with photos of real yards on those streets, and ask the customers they already have there for a review.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] On your grid from section 2, circle the searches where the winner is simply closer to the searcher.
- [ ] Open your profile's service area. Remove towns you don't really serve and add ones you do.
- [ ] If your address is a P.O. box or virtual office, switch to a service area with no address shown.

4 Their primary category

The idea. Your primary category is the one-line answer to "what is this business?" Google asks you to pick categories that finish the sentence "This business IS a," to use as few as you need, and not to use categories as keywords (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com). If the competitor's primary category matches the search and yours doesn't, they start with an edge on relevance.

You can see a competitor's main category right under their name on Google Maps.

Example. A made-up house cleaner's primary category is "Janitorial service," left over from an old office contract. The competitor above them uses "House cleaning service." The cleaner switches their primary category to "House cleaning service" and keeps "Janitorial service" as a second one, for the office work they still do.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Look under the competitor's name on Google Maps and write down the category shown.
- [ ] Open your profile and check your primary category. Does it match what your best customers search?
- [ ] Remove secondary categories for work you don't do.

5 Their business name

The idea. Sometimes the other guy is first because their map name is "Emergency Plumbing Repair Pros," and Google reads it as a perfect match. If that's their real name, on their sign and paperwork, it's allowed. If it's stuffed with search words, it breaks Google's rules. Google says service descriptions don't belong in the name, and that extra words "could result in the suspension of your Business Profile" (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com).

Don't copy them. A stuffed name puts your own profile at risk, and our guide Google Profile Suspended? Get It Back shows how much trouble that is. Report theirs instead. Google's Business Redressal Complaint Form takes reports of misleading names, phone numbers and web addresses on Maps (Google Business Redressal Complaint Form, support.google.com).

Example. A made-up roofer finds a map listing called "Roof Repair Storm Damage (your town)," with no website and no address. They search their state's contractor license lookup and find nothing under that name. They save screenshots of the listing and send them through the redressal form, with a note that no license exists under that name. Then they get back to work.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Compare the competitor's map name with the name on their website, trucks or sign.
- [ ] If the map name has extra search words, save screenshots and report it through the redressal form.
- [ ] Check that your own name matches your sign and paperwork exactly. Remove any extra words.

6 How complete their profile is

The idea. Google says businesses with complete and accurate info are more likely to show up in local results, and that verifying your profile makes you more likely to appear (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com). Complete means every box: services, service area, hours, phone, website, description and photos.

Plenty of competitors that seem unbeatable simply filled in every field. Compare yours with theirs line by line.

Example. A made-up plumber compares profiles with the company above them. The competitor lists 22 services, each with a line of text: water heater installation, drain cleaning, sewer line repair, sump pumps and more. The plumber lists four. That night, they add the 15 services they really do, each with one plain sentence.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Open both profiles side by side. Count services, photos and empty fields.
- [ ] Add every service you really do, each with a one-line description.
- [ ] Check your hours, phone number and website link.
- [ ] Make sure your profile is verified. If it isn't, start verification today.

7 Their reviews: how many, and how new

The idea. Reviews are the part of prominence you can grow every week. Google says more reviews and positive ratings can help your local ranking (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com). Customers care how fresh they are too. In BrightLocal's 2026 survey, 74% of consumers said they look for reviews from the last three months (BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026, brightlocal.com).

Write down three things for the competitor: total reviews, star average, and the date of the newest one. Then write down yours. Our free reviews calculator works out how many 5-star reviews you need to reach a 4.8.

One rule to know: Google doesn't allow offering discounts, money or free work in exchange for a review, or asking only your happy customers (Google Maps content policy, support.google.com). Ask everyone, the same way.

Example. A made-up painter has 41 reviews at 4.9 stars, with the newest from April. The company above them has 63 at 4.7, with six from the last month. The painter starts texting their review link the day of each final walk-through. By the end of the season, their newest review is never more than two weeks old.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Write down both companies' review count, star average and newest review date.
- [ ] Get your review link from your profile (look for "Ask for reviews").
- [ ] Text it to every customer whose job you finished in the last 30 days.
- [ ] Reply to every review you haven't answered. Google says helpful replies help you stand out.

8 The websites that mention them

The idea. Google says prominence also uses how many websites link to your business (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com). For a local trade, the links that matter are usually ordinary ones: your supplier's find-a-pro page, the chamber of commerce, a youth sports sponsor page, a local news story, your trade association's member list.

The competitor above you may simply be mentioned in more of these places. Find out where, and get on the ones that fit you.

Example. A made-up HVAC company searches the competitor's name in quotes. It finds them on their equipment brand's dealer page, the county home builders' association member list, and a local news story about a school fundraiser they sponsored. The HVAC company has none of these. They ask their brand rep for a dealer listing and join the builders' association, which lists members with a link.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Search the competitor's business name in quotes. List every local site that mentions them.
- [ ] Do the same search for your own name.
- [ ] Pick two places on their list that fit you too: a supplier, an association, a sponsor page or a local group.
- [ ] Ask one of them for a listing this week.

9 The page their profile sends people to

The idea. Your profile links to one page on your website. When it says plainly what you do and where, it backs up your profile for both Google and the customer. When it's a generic homepage with a slideshow and no services, it doesn't help either one.

Click the website link on the competitor's profile, then on yours. Compare what each page says in its first screen on a phone.

Example. A made-up roofer's profile links to a homepage that says "Quality you can count on" and nothing else above the fold. The competitor's links to a page headed "Roof repair and replacement in (their town) and nearby," with the towns listed, photos of real roofs and a call button. The roofer rewrites their first screen to say what they do, where, and how to call.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Open the website link on both profiles, on your phone.
- [ ] Write down what each first screen says: the trade, the towns, a phone number, a button.
- [ ] Rewrite your first screen in five lines: what you do, where, one proof, your number and one button.
- [ ] Check that every service on your profile has a matching line or page on your site.

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

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 3

Your 24-hour check

10 The side-by-side page

The idea. Put the seven things on one page, you against the company that beat you. Most owners find two or three gaps they can close this week, and one (usually distance) they can't. Fix the ones you can, in this order: name and category first, then the profile fields, then reviews, then links and your site.

Example (sample numbers). A made-up landscaper fills it in against the crew that keeps beating them:

What to check	You	Them	Your fix
Distance (section 3)	12 minutes from the suburb	Based in it	Can't change. Win the next six.
Primary category (section 4)	Landscape designer	Lawn care service	Switch to lawn care service
Name (section 5)	Matches the sign	Has "Lawn Mowing" added	Report it
Profile filled in (section 6)	5 services, no hours	18 services, hours	Add services and hours
Reviews (section 7)	22, newest in May	48, newest last week	Text the review link after every visit
Sites that mention you (section 8)	1	6	Ask the garden center for a listing
Linked page (section 9)	Generic homepage	Lawn care page with towns	Rewrite the first screen

The landscaper does the first four fixes the same evening. Reviews and listings take the rest of the season.

Do it in 24 hours

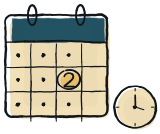
- [ ] Copy the table above onto paper or into your phone notes.
- [ ] Fill in "You" and "Them" for the company that beat you most often on your grid.
- [ ] Do every fix that takes under ten minutes today: name, category, services, hours.
- [ ] Put a reminder in your phone for 30 days from now to run the searches from section 2 again.

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:

- [ ] Run your five customer searches from three spots and make the grid (section 2).
- [ ] Fix your name, category and service area (sections 3 to 5).
- [ ] Fill in every field on your profile and text your review link to last month's customers (sections 6 and 7).
- [ ] Fill in the side-by-side page and set a 30-day reminder to search again (section 10).

Next, read Show Up When Customers Ask ChatGPT. The same fixes help there too.



If you'd rather hand it off

Grow That Local does every fix in this guide for local businesses. Each service starts with a free sample, so you see the work before you pay.

Best fit for this guide: SEO. Free sample: a ranking check and 10 fixes. SEO is $400 a month, with a 7-day full refund.

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.

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.

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 to check it:

1. BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026 (1,002 US adults, published Feb 2026): 74% look for reviews from the last three months. brightlocal.com (section 7)

Rules and guidance cited (not statistics), each checked on Google's own page on 2026-11-12:

- Google Business Profile Help, "Tips to improve your local ranking on Google" (relevance, distance, prominence; complete info; verification; reviews; links; no paid ranking): support.google.com (sections 1, 6, 7, 8)
- Google Business Profile Help, "Guidelines for representing your business on Google" (names, addresses, service areas of about 2 hours' drive, categories): support.google.com (sections 3, 4, 5)
- Google Business Redressal Complaint Form (misleading names, phone numbers and web addresses on Maps): support.google.com (section 5)
- Google Maps user-contributed content policy (bans incentives for reviews and asking only happy customers): support.google.com (section 7)

GTL estimates

These are our own judgment, not measured facts:

1. A competitor based in the next town will often beat you there, and you'll often beat them in yours (section 3). Reasoning: distance is one of Google's three things, so the business nearer the searcher starts ahead.
2. A primary category that matches the search gives an edge on relevance (section 4). Reasoning: it's Google's one-line answer to what your business is, and Google asks you to pick it that way.
3. A clear linked page backs up your profile (section 9). Reasoning: it's where Google and the customer both go next, and a page that names the job and the towns tells both of them the same story as the profile.
4. Fix in the order name and category, profile fields, reviews, then links and site (section 10). Reasoning: the first two take minutes, while reviews and links take weeks, so the quick fixes start working while the slow ones build.

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.

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