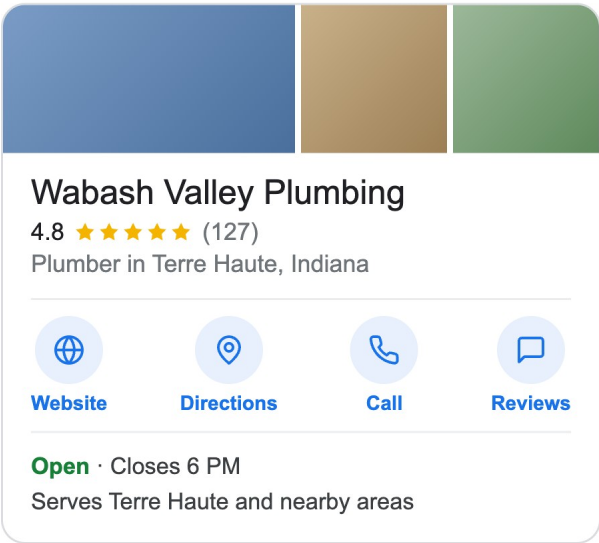




FREE PLAYBOOK LOCAL SEO FOR SMALL BUSINESS

The Google Business Profile Playbook

How to set up, verify and keep up your free Google listing so local customers find you, trust you and call you — without breaking Google’s rules.



WHAT CUSTOMERS SEE FIRST

Often before they ever reach your website.

- 1 Name**
Your real business name, nothing added
- 2 Rating**
Reviews are a top ranking signal
- 3 Category**
The #1 ranking factor
- 4 Buttons**
Calls and directions come straight from here
- 5 Hours & area**
Open now and where you serve

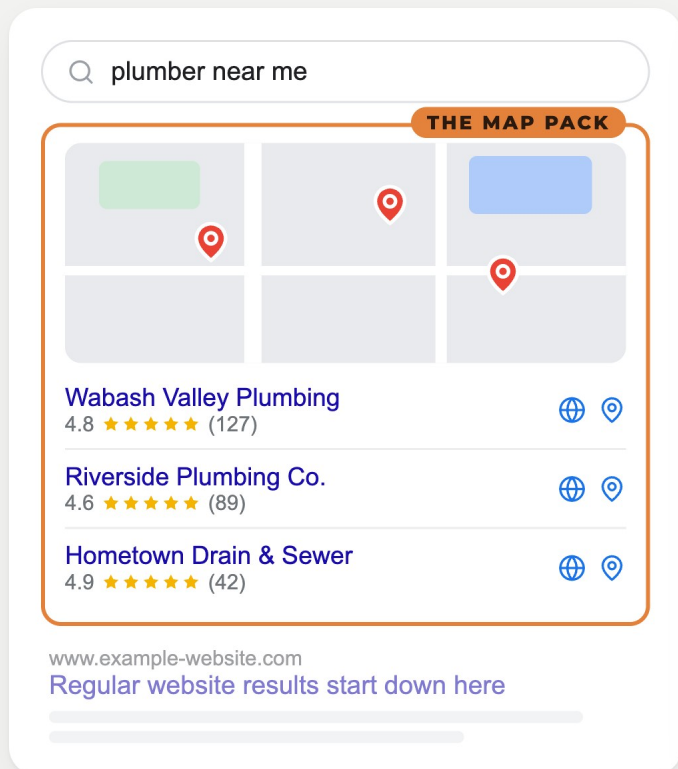
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01 WHY YOUR PROFILE MATTERS

For local searches, the map comes first

When someone searches “plumber near me,” Google shows a map with three businesses before any regular website results. That box is called the **map pack**, and your free Google Business Profile is your ticket into it. It shows your phone number, hours, reviews and directions — often before anyone visits your website.

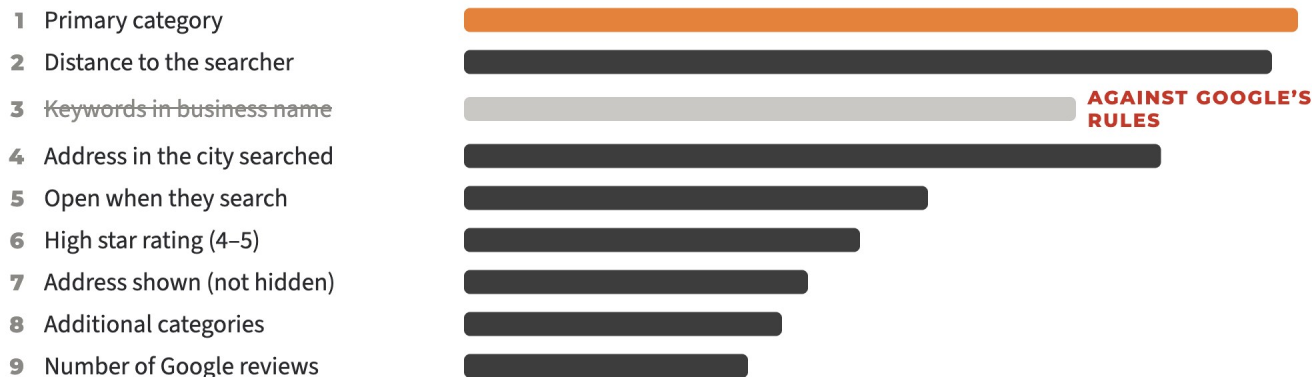


HOW GOOGLE PICKS THE THREE

- Relevance**
 How well your profile matches what they searched. Categories, services and description do the work.
- Distance**
 How close you are to the searcher. You can't change it, so nail the other two.
- Prominence**
 How well-known and trusted you are: reviews, rating, links and mentions around the web.

WHAT LOCAL SEO PROS SAY MATTERS MOST

Top map-pack ranking factors from Whitespark's 2026 survey of local search experts.



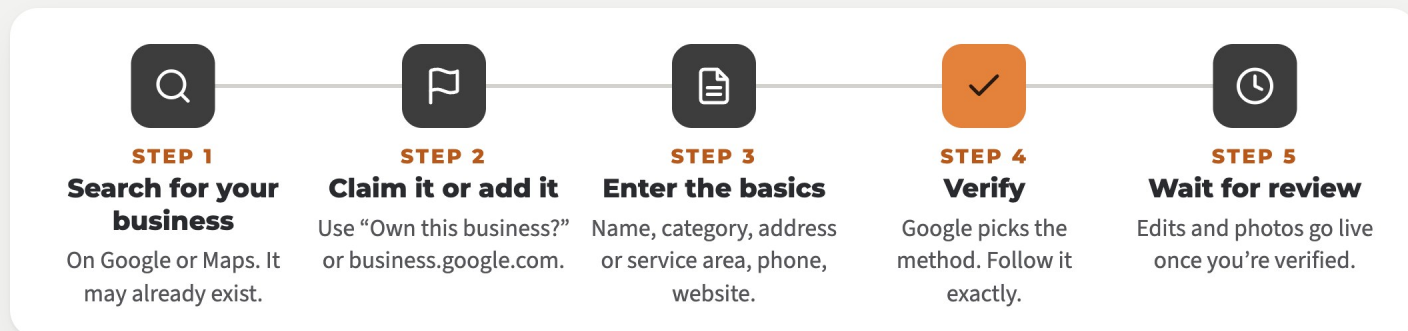
THE CATCH

Keywords in your business name help rankings — and get profiles suspended. Google only allows your real-world name. Fill in your categories and services instead.

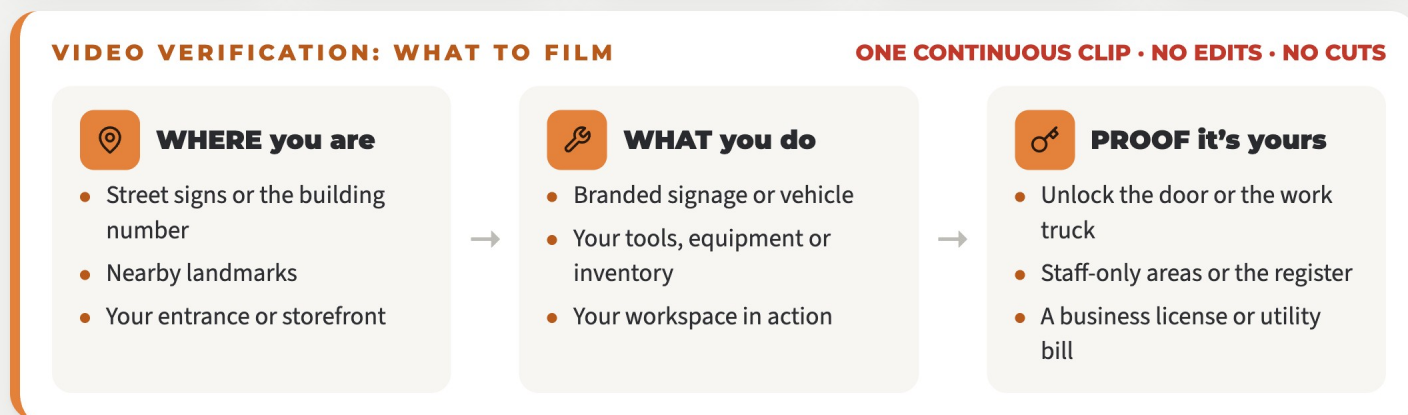
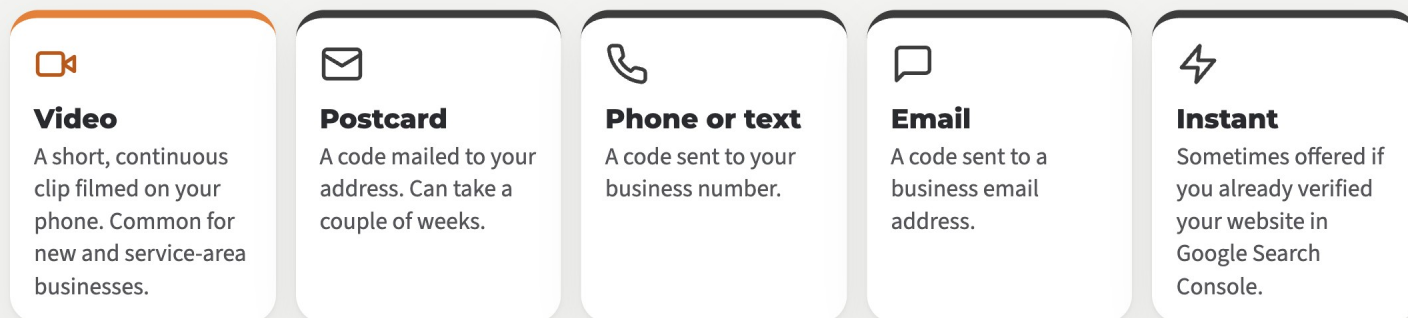
02 CLAIM & VERIFY

Claim your profile and prove you're real

Your business may already be on Google — customers and Google itself can add listings. Claiming it puts you in control. Verifying it proves to Google that you're a real business at a real place, and nothing you add shows publicly until you do.



YOU DON'T PICK THE METHOD — GOOGLE DOES



NEVER START OVER

If verification fails or gets stuck, don't create a second profile to try again. Duplicates are a top reason profiles get suspended. Fix what doesn't match, then retry or contact Google support with your documents.

03 SET IT UP RIGHT

Fill in everything, and follow the rules

A complete profile ranks better and answers questions before customers call. These setup mistakes are also the ones that most often get profiles suspended.

YOUR BUSINESS NAME

Use your real-world name exactly as it appears on your sign, truck and paperwork.

✓ **Wabash Valley Plumbing**
Matches the sign, truck and invoices

✗ ~~Wabash Valley Plumbing — Best Plumber Terre Haute~~
Keywords and city added

✗ ~~Wabash Valley Plumbing | Open 24/7 | Call Now~~
Hours, tagline, call to action

Want a keyword in your name? Then it has to be your real name first — on your signs, vehicles, invoices and registration.

WHERE YOU SERVE CUSTOMERS

 **Storefront**
Customers come to you

Show your address. Needs permanent signage and staff during your hours. No P.O. boxes, mailbox stores or virtual offices.

 **Service area**
You go to customers

Hide your address — home-based is fine. Pick up to 20 cities or ZIP codes within about 2 hours' drive.

 **Hybrid**
Both

Show your address and add the areas you travel to.

FILL IN EVERY FIELD

 **Categories**
Pick the most specific primary category. Add only the extras that are truly core.

 **Services & products**
List every service by name, with a short description and price if you can.

✓ **Attributes**
Veteran-owned, accessibility, payment types, online estimates and more.

 **Description**
Up to 750 characters on what you do and who you serve. No links or hype.

 **Hours**
Regular hours plus holiday hours. Being open when they search is a ranking factor.

 **Links**
Website, booking or quote link, and your social profiles.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

Who you are, what you do, where, and why choose you. Plain words, no links.

Wabash Valley Plumbing is a family-owned plumbing company serving Terre Haute and the Wabash Valley since 2004. We handle leaks, clogs, water heaters, sump pumps and bathroom remodels for homes and small businesses. Licensed and insured, with upfront pricing and same-day service on most calls.

04 PHOTOS & VIDEO

Show them who you are before they call

Photos are often the first thing people look at, and real ones beat stock every time. Use this shot list to fill your profile, then keep adding a few new photos each month.

YOUR SHOT LIST



Logo

Square, clean, readable small



Cover photo

Your best single image



Exterior

Helps people find you



Inside

Your shop, office or showroom



Team

Real faces build trust



Your work

Jobs in progress and finished



Vehicles

Branded truck or van



Products

What you sell, close up



PHOTO SPECS

Format **JPG or PNG**

File size **10 KB – 5 MB**

Recommended **720 × 720 px**

Minimum **250 × 250 px**



720 × 720



250 min



VIDEO SPECS

Length **Up to 30 seconds**

File size **Up to 75 MB**

Quality **720p or higher**

Ideas: a 20-second shop tour, a before-and-after, or you explaining what makes your service different.

PHOTO RULES OF THUMB

- ✓ Real photos of your real business — no stock photos
- ✓ Well lit, in focus, minimal filters or edits
- ✓ Add new photos every month so the profile stays fresh
- ✓ Shoot horizontal and keep the subject centered; Google crops thumbnails

PAIRS WITH

The free **Social Media Size Cheat Sheet** for every other platform, and the **Image Utility Drawer** at frankswbresources.com/imagr to resize and compress photos in your browser.

05 GETTING MORE REVIEWS

Reviews: the best thing you can control

Your star rating and the number of reviews you have are two of the biggest ranking factors — and they're what customers read before they call. The secret is simply to ask, every time, in a way that makes it easy.



Finish the job

Right when they're happiest



Ask in person

"Would you mind leaving us a quick review?"



Send the link

Text, email, invoice or a QR card



They review

Takes them about a minute



You reply

Thank them, by name, within a few days



Loved our work?
Scan to leave a review

GET YOUR REVIEW LINK & QR CODE

- Search for your business on Google while signed in
- Click **Read reviews**, then **Get more reviews**
- Copy your short review link, or download the QR code
- Put it on invoices, receipts, emails, texts and a counter card

REPLY TO EVERY REVIEW

GOOD REVIEW: thank them, mention the job



"Thanks so much, Linda! Glad we got your water heater swapped out before the cold snap. We're here whenever you need us."

BAD REVIEW: stay calm, own it, take it offline



"Mike, I'm sorry we ran late. That's not how we want to treat anyone. Please call me at the shop so I can make it right. — Dave, owner"

NEVER DO THIS

- ✗ Offer discounts, freebies or entries for reviews
- ✗ Ask only your happy customers ("review gating")
- ✗ Review yourself, or have staff or family do it
- ✗ Pressure customers for 5 stars
- ✗ Buy reviews or trade them with other businesses

WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOU ASK

IN PERSON

"We really appreciate your business. Reviews help a small local company like ours more than you'd think — would you mind leaving us a quick one on Google? I'll text you the link."

TEXT MESSAGE

"Hi Linda, thanks again for choosing Wabash Valley Plumbing today! If you have a minute, we'd love to hear how we did: [your review link] — Dave"

Google removes reviews that break its rules and can restrict or suspend profiles that collect them. Ask every customer, and let the honest reviews fall where they may.

06 KEEPING IT ACTIVE

A profile that looks alive gets more calls

Setting it up is step one. Profiles that get regular attention — new photos, posts and review replies — tend to stay visible and look trustworthy. It only takes about 20 minutes a week.

A SIMPLE MONTHLY ROUTINE

WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
Post an update A recent job, tip, offer or event	Add new photos 3–5 real photos from this month	Answer reviews Reply to every new review	Check your info Hours, holidays, services, edits

GOOGLE POSTS
 Short updates that show on your profile. Add a photo and a button.

Update
 News, a finished project, a seasonal tip

Offer
 A deal with dates and a coupon code

Event
 Open house, workshop or sale with a date and time

THE Q&A SECTION IS GONE — HERE'S WHAT REPLACED IT

Google retired profile Q&A starting in late 2025. Now Google's AI answers customers' questions using what it finds about you:

Your profile · services, hours, attributes

Your reviews · what customers say

Your website · especially an FAQ page

Your posts · recent updates

→

AI answer in Google Maps
"Do they do emergency calls on weekends?"
 Yes — reviewers mention Saturday repairs, and their website lists 24/7 emergency service.

TRACK WHAT'S WORKING Example numbers

Your profile's **Performance** page shows how people found you and what they did. Check it monthly and watch the trend.

Calls 38 +12%	Directions 61 +8%	Website clicks 94 +21%	Searches 1,240 +15%
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WATCH YOUR EMAIL

Anyone can suggest edits to your profile, and Google sometimes applies them. Google emails verified owners about important changes — so make sure that email goes to an inbox you actually check.

07 LOCAL SEO BEYOND GOOGLE

Back up your profile everywhere else

Google cross-checks your profile against the rest of the web. When your name, address and phone match everywhere, and your website clearly says what you do and where, Google trusts your listing more.

THE SAME NAP, EVERYWHERE

Name, Address, Phone — spelled exactly the same, every time.

NAME Wabash Valley Plumbing

ADDRESS 1234 Example St, Terre Haute, IN 47807

PHONE (812) 555-0123

CHECK IT ON

- ✓ Your website
- ✓ Google
- ✓ Facebook
- ✓ Bing Places
- ✓ Apple Business Connect
- ✓ Yelp
- ✓ BBB
- ✓ Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Nextdoor
- ✓ Angi / industry sites



YOUR WEBSITE'S JOB

- ✓ A page for each main service, and each town you serve
- ✓ Name, address and phone in the footer of every page
- ✓ An FAQ page answering real customer questions
- ✓ Local business schema markup (ask your web person)



BUILD LOCAL TRUST

Local links

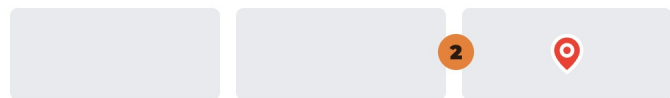
Chamber membership, sponsoring a team, local news, suppliers and partners linking to you.

Mentions

Being talked about on local sites, blogs and forums — now a big signal for AI search answers, too.

yoursite.com/water-heater-repair-terre-haute

1 Water Heater Repair in Terre Haute, IN



3 Common questions

4 Wabash Valley Plumbing · 1234 Example St, Terre Haute, IN · (812) 555-0123

ANATOMY OF A LOCAL SERVICE PAGE

- 1 Service **and** city in the page title and heading
- 2 An embedded map and real photos of local jobs
- 3 FAQs in plain words — this is what AI answers pull from
- 4 Name, address and phone that match your Google profile exactly

USE YOUR BRAND KIT

Your logo, colors and voice should match on your profile, website and every listing. The free **Brand Message Playbook** walks you through building a simple brand style guide.

08 CHECKLIST & RED FLAGS

Your Google Business Profile checklist

ONE-TIME SETUP

- ☐ Profile claimed and verified
- ☐ Real business name, no extras
- ☐ Most specific primary category
- ☐ Address shown or hidden correctly
- ☐ Service areas set (up to 20)
- ☐ Hours and holiday hours
- ☐ Every service listed
- ☐ 750-character description
- ☐ Logo, cover and 10+ real photos
- ☐ Review link and QR code ready

EVERY MONTH

- ☐ Post at least one update
- ☐ Add 3–5 new photos
- ☐ Reply to every review
- ☐ Ask every customer for a review
- ☐ Check hours, info and suggested edits
- ☐ Review your Performance stats

SUSPENSION RED FLAGS

-  **Keywords or city in your name**
The most common suspension trigger
-  **P.O. box, mailbox store or virtual office**
Not an eligible address
-  **A second or duplicate profile**
Even to retry verification
-  **Big changes all at once**
Name, address and category edits together
-  **Fake, paid or swapped reviews**
Can remove reviews or the whole profile
-  **Website or listings that don't match**
Mismatched name, address or phone

Suspended? Don't make a new profile. Fix the problem, then appeal with proof like a license, utility bill or signage photos.

YOUR 15-MINUTE PROFILE CHECKUP



Search your business name

Does your profile show up, with the right info?



Search “[service] near me”

Use a private browser window. Are you in the map pack?



Open Google Maps on your phone

Check photos, hours and how your reviews look.



Ask a friend to find you

Watch where they get stuck or confused.



Want it done for you?

Get A Local Website sets up and manages Google profiles for local businesses.

getalocalwebsite.com/google-business-profile

Checked October 2026. Google changes Business Profile features often — check Google's Business Profile Help pages for the latest rules.



Frank Deardurff

SENIOR WEB DEVELOPER & CONSULTANT • THAT ONE WEB GUY

Nearly 30 years building, fixing and maintaining websites for small businesses in the Terre Haute area.

Questions about this report?

(812) 208-3259

frank@thatonewebguy.com