



The Complete Guide to *Local SEO*

Get found by nearby customers on Google, Apple Maps, Bing and AI assistants, turn those views into calls and visits, and do it inside the rules, with a plan you can start Monday.

Digital Ingenuity

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Read this first

Local SEO is the work of showing up when someone near you searches for what you do, and turning that moment into a call, a visit or a booked job. Here is the whole book in ten lines.

-
- | | |
|-----------|--|
| <i>01</i> | Google says local results come down to relevance, distance and prominence, and that no one can pay for a better local rank. ¹ |
| <i>02</i> | Distance is measured from each searcher, so check your rank across a grid of points, never from your own desk. ^{1 2} |
| <i>03</i> | Your Business Profile must match the real world: name, address or service area, phone, hours and categories. ³ |
| <i>04</i> | Ask every customer for a review the same way. Never pay for reviews, filter out unhappy customers or tell people what to write. ^{4 5 6} |
| <i>05</i> | Give each location and each core service its own page with real local proof, and mark each location up with LocalBusiness data that matches the page. ^{7 8} |
| <i>06</i> | Keep one set of facts everywhere you are listed: Google, Apple Maps, Bing, Yelp, Facebook and your own site. ^{3 9} |
| <i>07</i> | Earn local links and mentions the honest way, and mark paid ones as sponsored. ^{8 10} |
| <i>08</i> | AI assistants draw on maps data, search indexes and websites. Let their search crawlers in and keep your facts consistent. ^{11 12 13} |
| <i>09</i> | Keep an evidence folder, so a suspension becomes paperwork instead of a crisis. ¹⁴ |
| <i>10</i> | Once a month, run the Grid and Ledger: where you show up, and what showing up produced. ^{15 16} |
-

Short on time? Take the scorecard at the back first. Each line names the chapter to open, so your lowest scores tell you where to start. Every checklist line begins with who usually does it: the Owner, the Web person who runs your site, or the Office, meaning whoever answers the phone and books the work.

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How Google *decides* who shows up

When someone nearby searches for what you do, Google shows local results on Google Maps and Search, often a map and a short list of businesses.¹ Here is how Google says that list is chosen, in its own words, and which parts of it you can move.

1.1

Three dials, in Google's words

Google's help page for business owners says local results are "mainly based on relevance, distance, and popularity," and then explains them under three headings: Relevance, Distance and Prominence.¹ We call them dials, because two of them move when you work on them and one does not.

TABLE 1.1 3 ROWS

DIAL	GOOGLE'S DEFINITION	WHAT FEEDS IT	YOURS TO MOVE?
Relevance	How well your Business Profile matches what someone is searching for ¹	Your categories, ¹⁷ your services and other profile details, ¹¹⁸ and the category signals Google reads from your website and from mentions of you across the web ³	Yes
Distance	How far each business is from the person searching; if they do not share a location, Google uses what it knows about it ¹	Where the searcher is	No
Prominence	How well known a business is, based in part on how many websites link to it and how many reviews it has ¹	Links to your site, your review count and your ratings ¹	Yes

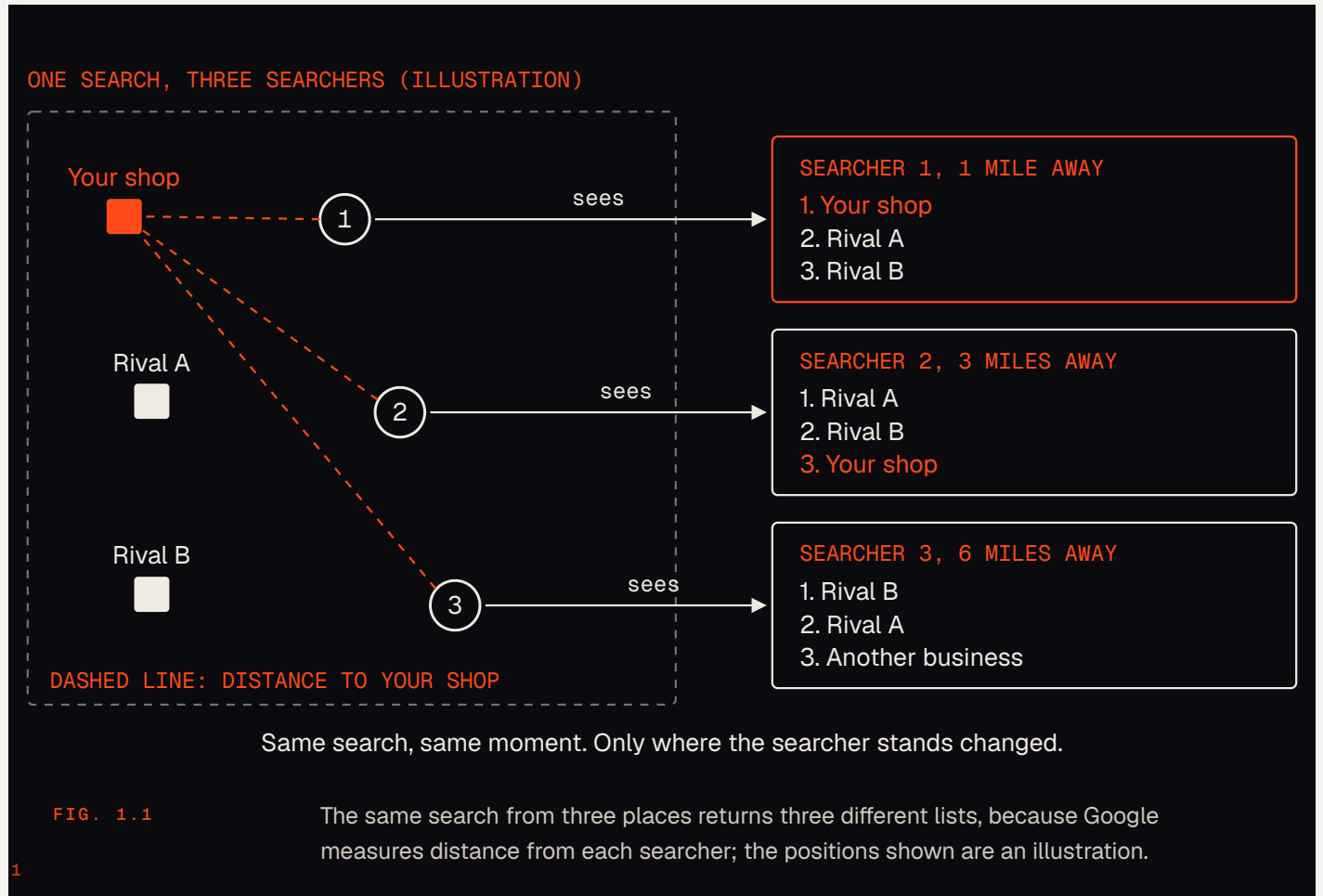
Google adds that more reviews and positive ratings can help, and that complete, accurate information makes a business more likely to show up at all.¹

1.2

Where Google gets its facts about you

Google compiles business information from public web content such as your website, from licensed third-party data, from users and owners, and from its own contact with your business.¹⁹ It shows the result on Search and Maps, and in other companies' apps through the Google Maps

Platform.¹⁹ Google may also update your profile from those other sources,²⁰ so the rest of the web has to agree with you. Chapter 7 shows how to make it agree.



1.3

What Google tells owners to do

Google's own list is short: verify your business, keep your information complete and up to date, respond to reviews, add photos and videos, and, for retail stores, show in-store products.¹ Chapter 3 covers the profile work and Chapter 5 the reviews. The rest of this book covers what that list leaves out: measuring, addresses, your website, the wider web, many locations, AI answers and staying safe.

1.4

Distance is fixed. The other two dials are not.

You cannot move your shop closer to every customer. Because Google measures distance from the person searching,¹ your position changes from one part of town to the next, and the same search can rank you first near your shop and nowhere across town. What you can change is how far out you still make the list. That reach is where relevance and prominence show, and Chapter 2 shows you how to see it on a map.

1.5

Your money searches

Everything in this book is measured against a short list of searches that bring you paying work. Write down three to five, in your customers' words, not your trade's words. Keep the list fixed; Chapter 2 measures it every month. The pairs below show the difference.

TABLE 1.2 7 ROWS

BUSINESS	YOUR TRADE'S WORDS	YOUR CUSTOMERS' WORDS
Plumbing	Tank water heater replacement	water heater repair
Dental	Endodontic treatment	emergency dentist
Family law	Conservatorship litigation	custody lawyer
Auto repair	Brake system service	brake repair
Real estate	Listing representation	sell my house
Restaurant	Wood-fired Neapolitan pizza	pizza delivery
Private school	Independent college preparatory education	private school near me

METHOD

The Three Dials

01

Take your money searches. Use the three to five searches from your list, one row each on the worksheet below.

02

Check relevance. For each search, find the matching category, the matching service on your profile and the matching page on your website. A missing match is a relevance gap.

03

Check from two places. Look at results near your location and on the far side of your service area. Chapter 2 shows how, with a tool or without one.

04

Read the pattern. This is our reading, not Google's. Missing even close to your location points to relevance. Strong close in, but losing to nearby rivals farther out, points to prominence. Strong close in and fading for everyone is distance working as designed.

05

Turn the right dial. Fix relevance with categories, services and pages. Fix prominence with reviews, links and local mentions. No setting fixes distance.

EXAMPLE

A three-truck plumbing company in Frisco

The company is in the top three for "water heater repair" within about two miles of its shop and outside the top twenty on the far side of town.

Relevance checks out: primary category Plumber, water heater services listed, a page for each.

Two rivals hold steady on the far side. Each has more reviews from customers there and a link from a neighborhood association. The reading is prominence. The plan: ask every customer on that side of town for a review, publish a page about real jobs there with photos, and sponsor one local youth team for the name recognition with families there. If the team's website links to its sponsors, the company asks for that link to be marked sponsored.¹⁰ It checks again in 30 days. All numbers in this example are for illustration.

☐ CHECKLIST

7 ITEMS

- ☐ **Owner:** Your profile is verified.¹
- ☐ **Owner:** Three to five money searches are written down, in your customers' words.
- ☐ **Owner:** Your primary category is the most specific one that fits.¹⁷
- ☐ **Owner:** Every core service appears on your profile.¹⁸
- ☐ **Web person:** Your website names the same services and the same area as your profile.
- ☐ **Office:** You know your review count and rating next to the three businesses that outrank you.
- ☐ **Web person:** You know which websites link to you (Chapter 7 shows where to look).

Money searches and relevance check

One row per money search. Mark each match yes or no, then write the first gap to fix.

SEARCH, IN CUSTOMERS' WORDS	MATCHING CATEGORY	MATCHING SERVICE ON PROFILE	MATCHING PAGE ON SITE	FIRST GAP TO FIX

NOTES

CHAPTER 1 • IN SHORT

“*“There's no way to request or pay for a better local ranking on Google.” That is Google's sentence, not ours.*”¹

-
- 01 Relevance and prominence are yours to move. Distance is not.¹
-
- 02 Google builds your profile from many sources, so they must agree.¹⁹
-
- 03 No one can pay Google for a better local rank.¹
-

02

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Know where you *stand*

One search from your office shows almost nothing. Before you change anything, set up two instruments: a grid that shows where you appear, and a ledger that shows what appearing produced.

NOTE

Rules change, and this is not legal advice

From here on, this guide describes Google's rules, other platforms' rules and federal law. Each carries a source mark, and platforms change their rules often, so open the linked page before you act on one. This guide is general information, not legal advice.

2.1

Why one search from your desk misleads you

Google says search results are specific to the time, place, device and recent history of the person searching,² and local results add distance, measured from the searcher.¹ The result on your screen is the result for one person in one spot: you.

2.2

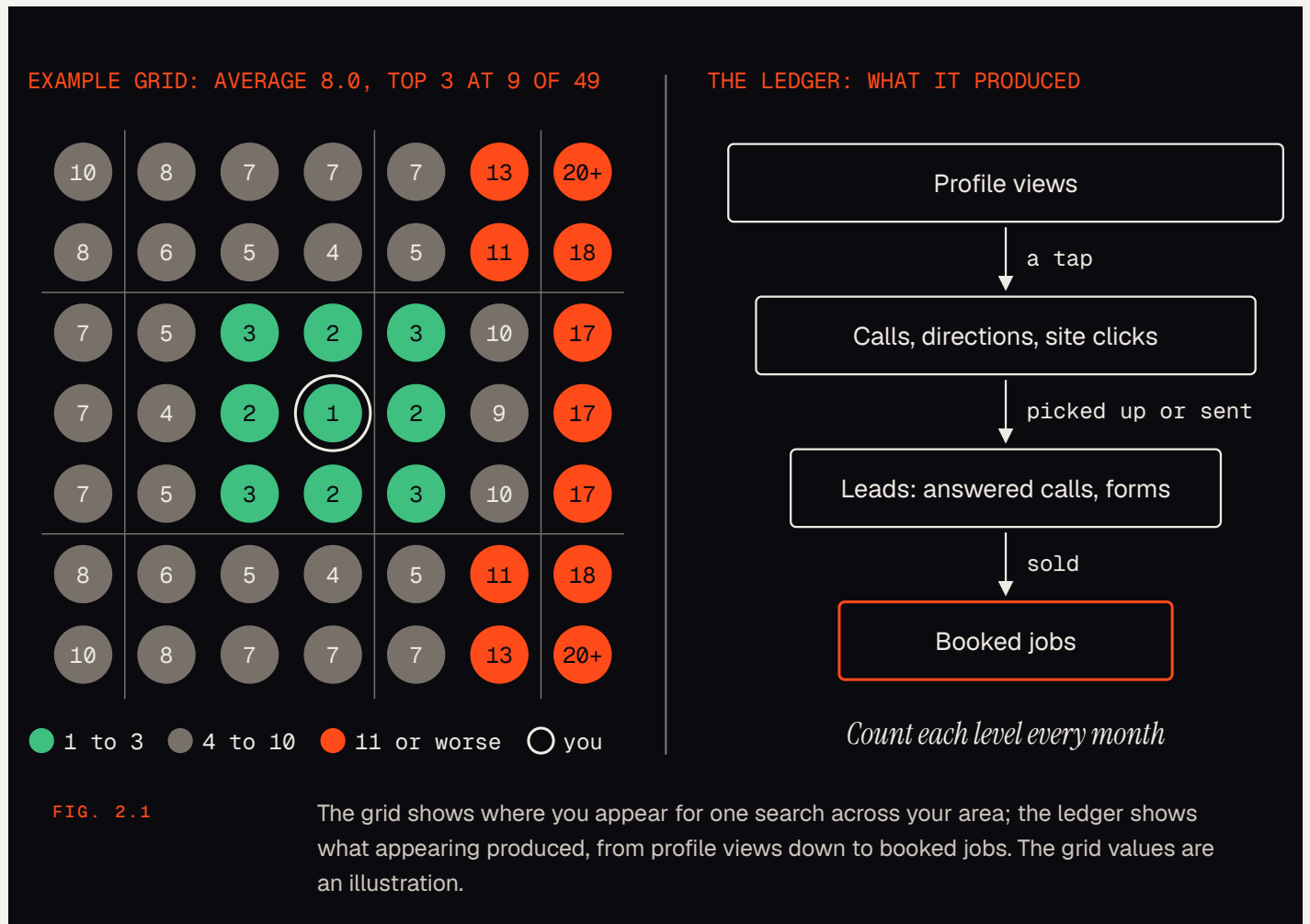
The map grid

A map grid is a set of points laid over your service area where you check your rank for one search. For each money search, record two numbers: your average position, and the share of points where you are in the top three. The top three is our convention, not a Google number: it is a short list a searcher takes in at a glance.

With a tool. A rank tracking tool that checks a grid of points runs the same search as if from each point and records your position there. We suggest 7 by 7 points spread evenly over your real service area, not a neat circle around the office, closer together in a dense city and farther apart in open country. That is our suggestion, not a rule.

Without a tool. Pick five points: your office and one near each edge of your service area. Ask someone at each place, such as a crew member on a job there, to run the same search on a phone in a private browser window and send you a screenshot. Record your position, or "not

shown." It is a rough check, because results depend on the time, place, device and history of the person searching,² so compare the same points month to month.



EXAMPLE

An HVAC company in Plano reads its first grid

The grid above is the company's first run for "AC repair," with its office at the center point. Counting "20+" as 20, the average position is 8.0, and the company is in the top three at 9 of 49 points, which is 18 percent. All 11 points where it ranks 11th or worse sit in the two easternmost columns, on the east side of town, where it does about a third of its work. Those 14 points average 14.6, against 5.4 for the other 35.

CONTINUED

Profile calls are flat. Website visits from the profile look low until the owner tags the link and can separate profile visits from other Google traffic. Month 0 on the baseline sheet reads: grid average 8.0, top three at 18 percent. The company shows strongly close in while one rival holds the east side, so the Three Dials reading is prominence. The first change log line: "Started review asks on every east side job." All numbers in this example are for illustration.

2.3

The Business Profile numbers, read correctly

The Performance page covers verified profiles only, and its numbers include both unpaid results and Google Ads.¹⁵

TABLE 2.1 5 ROWS

METRIC	WHAT IT COUNTS	READ IT THIS WAY
Calls	Taps on the call button on your profile ¹⁵	Not answered calls. Compare with your phone records.
Directions	Direction requests, with repeat taps, cancellations and spam removed ¹⁵	The best walk-in signal for a storefront.
Website clicks	Clicks from your profile to your site ¹⁵	Confirm them with a tagged link.
Searches	The terms people used to find you, updated at the start of each month and up to 5 days late ¹⁵	Look for services you do not list yet.
Views	Unique people, each counted at most once a day ¹⁵	A reach number, not a result.

2.4

The website numbers

Four jobs turn your website into a measuring instrument. If someone else runs your site, forward them the sheet below. Tag the profile's website link like this, with the same values on every profile: `example.com/plano/?`

utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=profile.
Google says to always use utm_source, utm_medium and
utm_campaign.²¹

Know the limits. Once Google Analytics is linked to your profile, it shows your profile's calls, directions, website clicks, messages and bookings, but only for the last 6 months, and with several profiles linked it shows only their sum.¹⁶ Keep your own monthly copy. Search Console counts visits from AI Overviews and AI Mode under the Web search type.¹¹

Dial diagnosis

One row per money search, filled from your grid. Name the weak dial with the Three Dials pattern in Chapter 1, then the first fix.

SEARCH	RANK NEAR US	RANK FAR SIDE	WEAK DIAL, AND WHY	FIRST FIX

NOTES

2.5

The ledger: from actions to booked jobs

Profile actions are not customers. The ledger follows the chain to money: calls answered, forms received, jobs booked and, where you know it, revenue. A spreadsheet is enough. A call tracking service can record where each call came from and how it ended; read the warning below before its number goes on your profile.

Give this to your web person

Four jobs, each with a test for done. Tick the last column when the test passes.

JOB	WHAT TO DO	DONE WHEN	DONE
Tag the profile link	Add utm_source, utm_medium and utm_campaign to the website link on every profile ²¹	A test visit from the profile shows up in Google Analytics under the campaign name	
Mark leads as key events	Set up an event for each form submission and each tap on a click-to-call link, and mark each as a key event ²²	A test form and a test tap each appear as a key event	
Link Analytics to the profile	Connect Google Analytics to your Business Profile ¹⁶	Profile calls, directions and website clicks appear in Analytics	
Set up Search Console	Add and verify the website in Search Console ²	The Performance report shows the searches and pages that brought people to the site	

NOTES

! WARNING**Tracking numbers on your profile**

Google says a profile's phone number and website should be the single, authoritative number and website for the business.⁹ The number must stay under your direct control and must not send callers to anyone else's number.³ A profile takes up to 2 additional numbers,²³ and Google says additional numbers can be used on Business Profile websites and other local surfaces.³

We found no Google page on call tracking numbers, so this is our recommendation: keep your main number as the primary number on the profile and everywhere else. If you use call tracking, put the tracking number only in an additional slot, and only if it rings your business and you control it.

METHOD*The Grid and Ledger***01**

Fix the searches. Use your money searches from Chapter 1, and never change one without a note in the change log.

02

Run the grid. Same day of the month, same time, same settings or the same five points. Save every run.

03

Pull the profile numbers. Calls, direction requests and website clicks, from the Performance page or the download.

04

Count the leads. Answered calls from your phone records and form submissions from your key events.

05

Count the jobs. Booked jobs, and revenue if you know it.

06

Write the change log. One line on what changed this month. Without it you will never know which change moved which number.

☐ CHECKLIST

7 ITEMS

- ☐ **Owner:** A baseline grid saved for each money search, with a tool or the five-point method.
- ☐ **Web person:** Profile website link tagged with utm_source, utm_medium and utm_campaign.²¹
- ☐ **Web person:** Form submissions and click-to-call taps marked as key events.²²
- ☐ **Web person:** Google Analytics linked to your Business Profile.¹⁶
- ☐ **Web person:** Search Console set up for your website.²
- ☐ **Office:** Answered calls and booked jobs counted each month.
- ☐ **Owner:** Ledger started, with a monthly calendar reminder.

Baseline sheet

Fill Month 0 before you change anything, then one column a month.

MEASURE	MONTH 0	MONTH 1	MONTH 2	MONTH 3
Search 1: grid average				
Search 1: share in top three				
Search 2: grid average				
Search 2: share in top three				
Search 3: grid average				
Search 3: share in top three				
Profile calls				
Direction requests				
Website clicks				
Form leads				
Answered calls				
Booked jobs				
What we changed				

CHAPTER 2 · IN SHORT

“*Rank is the means. Booked jobs are the goal.*”

01 Your desk shows one result for one person. A grid shows your market.²

02 Profile calls are taps on a button, not conversations.¹⁵

03 Rank matters only as far as it produces booked jobs.

03

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Your Google Business *Profile*, built right

Your Business Profile is the one listing on Google that you edit yourself. Build it field by field: how each part works today, what Google's rules say, what to write and shoot, and which popular tactics now break the rules.

3.1

Claim or create

Search Google Maps for your business name. If a profile exists and no one on your team manages it, look for the Claim this business or Own this business button.²⁴ If someone else owns it, such as a former agency or employee, request ownership; Chapter 10 has the steps. Create a new profile only if none exists, because Google does not allow more than one profile for the same location.³

3.2

Eligibility, ownership and access

To have a profile, a business must make in-person contact with customers during its stated hours; lead generation companies and online-only businesses are not eligible.⁹ Google recommends limiting access to the owners and managers who need it and removing former employees.²⁵ Google also recommends turning on 2-Step Verification; do it on every account with access.²⁵

§ RULE

The business owns the profile

Google's third-party policies say the business must keep ownership or co-ownership of its profile at all times, so add outside help as a manager. A third party must let a client regain exclusive control within 7 business days of notice, and one that charges a fee must say that Business Profile itself costs nothing extra.²⁶

3.3

Verification

Google picks which verification methods you can use, from phone or text, email, live video call, video recording and postcard, and recommends video when you are eligible.²⁷ Review takes up to 5 business days.²⁷ A website verified in Search Console can lead to instant verification.²⁷ If you get a postcard, most codes arrive within 14

days and codes expire after 30 days.²⁷ While it is on its way, do not edit your name, address or category, and do not request a new code: a new request cancels the code in the mail and starts over.²⁷

3.4

Name

Use the name on your sign, your website and your stationery. Google does not allow marketing taglines, store codes, hours, phone numbers, web addresses, service information or location information in the name, and says unnecessary information there could get the profile suspended.³ Add "24 Hour Emergency Plumber Frisco TX" to a plain company name and you have a suspension risk, whatever other guides say.

3.5

Categories

You get one primary category and up to 9 more.²³ That is a ceiling, not a goal. Google says to use as few categories as possible and to choose specific ones.³ Pick only categories that complete the sentence, "This business IS a."³ When you pick a specific category, Google implicitly includes the broader ones, so skip any extra that repeats a more specific choice.³ Categories affect your local ranking, but you should not add one for every product or service,¹⁷ and adding or editing a category may trigger another verification, so decide once.¹⁷

How to choose. Run each money search and open the top three profiles. Write down the category each one shows under its name. Then pick the most specific category on Google's list that passes the "IS a" test for you. The names below are examples; confirm the exact wording in the category picker.

TABLE 3.1 8 ROWS

BUSINESS	TOO BROAD	MOST SPECIFIC FIT
Plumbing company	Contractor	Plumber
Heating and cooling company	Contractor	HVAC contractor
Children's dental practice	Dentist	Pediatric dentist
Injury law firm	Law firm	Personal injury lawyer
General auto repair	Repair service	Auto repair shop
Residential brokerage	Real estate	Real estate agency
Pizza place	Restaurant	Pizza restaurant
Private K to 12 school	School	Private school

3.6

Services

In many categories you can add suggested and custom services, group them, and add descriptions and prices; a service may be highlighted when people search for it.¹⁸ Custom names containing prices, phone numbers or personal information are rejected automatically.¹⁸ Customers reviewing a service business may be asked which service they received,²⁸ so your service list also shapes your reviews.

TIP

Write services the way customers ask for them

Water heater repair. Gas and electric tank heaters, repaired or replaced, with the old unit hauled away.

Drain cleaning. Kitchen, bath and main line drains cleared, then checked with a camera.

Leak detection. We find hidden leaks in walls, slabs and ceilings before we open anything up.

CONTINUED

One service per line, the customer's words in the name, one plain sentence, no price in the name.

3.7

Description

You have up to 750 characters, with no URLs or HTML,²³ and no links, promotions, prices or sales.³ Say what you do, for whom, where, and what a customer can count on.

EXAMPLE

A roofing description, before and after

Before, and against the rules: "Best roofers in Texas!!! Call now for 20% off. Roof repair Plano Frisco Allen McKinney Wylie."

After: "Family-owned roofing contractor for homes in Collin County. We repair storm and hail damage, replace shingle and metal roofs, and walk you through the insurance claim. Every job comes with a written scope, before and after photos, and one project lead you can call directly."

3.8

Hours

Set your regular customer-facing hours.³ Use special hours for holidays and other temporary changes, and more hours when parts of your business keep different hours.²³ Hours and an address are what let you appear for searches such as "open now."¹⁹ One exception beats the usual "fill in every field" advice: businesses that work only by appointment, or run varied schedules such as classes, should not list hours, and Google's examples include schools and universities.³

3.9

Phone, website and messages

A profile takes a primary phone number and up to 2 more.²³ The number must connect to that location and stay under your control.³ Point the website field at the location's own page, tagged as in Chapter 2. Business Profile chat and call history ended on July 31, 2024, and quote requests went with them.²⁹ In select regions, customers can now contact you from the profile by text message or WhatsApp.^{29 23} Where available, add one social link per platform.²³

3.10

Photos and videos

Google's specs: JPG or PNG, 10 KB to 5 MB, 720 by 720 pixels recommended and 250 by 250 at least; videos up to 30 seconds, up to 75 MB, at 720p or higher.³⁰ Photos should be in focus, well lit and free of heavy filters.³⁰ A poor cover photo may be replaced by a customer's photo, and uploads can take 24 to 48 hours to appear.³⁰ We found no Google guidance that recommends geotagging photo files, so skip it.

The shot list. Shoot what a customer wants to check before calling: your sign with the street around it, the entrance, the team, work in progress, finished work, and the inside if customers come in. Use real photos of real jobs, never stock photos, and add new ones as the work happens.

3.11

Posts

Posts come in three types: Updates, Offers and Events.³¹ Posts stay up for a long time: posts older than 6 months are archived unless they have a date range.³¹ You can schedule a post, set it to repeat, and publish one post to several profiles.³¹ A post whose text includes a phone number might be rejected if Google cannot verify the number belongs to the business.³¹ Let customers use the call button on your profile instead,

and add extra numbers to the profile itself.³¹ An Update can carry an action button that links to a page on your site.³¹ Google does not say posts raise rankings. Use them to show customers what is new.

EXAMPLE

An HVAC post, before and after

Before: "BEST AC REPAIR IN PLANO!!! Call 972-555-0100 NOW for 20% off!!!"

After: "Tune-up week in west Plano: our techs found the same problem on a third of the systems they checked, a clogged condensate line. Here is what it looks like and how to check yours in two minutes." The action button, Learn more, opens the page with the photos. All numbers in this example are for illustration.

3.12

Attributes and Q&A

You can set factual attributes, such as outdoor seating; subjective ones, such as whether a place is popular with locals, come from Google users.²³ Set every factual attribute that is true. Google says Q&A is available only for select categories and regions, and that it might change.²³ Treat it as a feature that may change or go away: do not build a plan around it, and check Google's Edit your Business Profile page for its current status.

3.13

Google's edits, and yours

Google may update your profile from other sources, such as user reports and licensed content, and shows the fields it changed in blue.²⁰ When told about a suggested edit, you have 4 days to accept or reject it; if you do not answer, Google may publish it when other public information,

such as your website, supports it.²⁰ In April 2026, Google said it had started rolling out email alerts so verified and active owners can review important edits before they go live.³²

4 days

to accept or reject a suggested edit before Google may publish it without you

SOURCE 20

METHOD

The Real-World Match

01

Stand at the door. For each field, ask: would a customer at your door, reading your sign or calling your number, find exactly this?

02

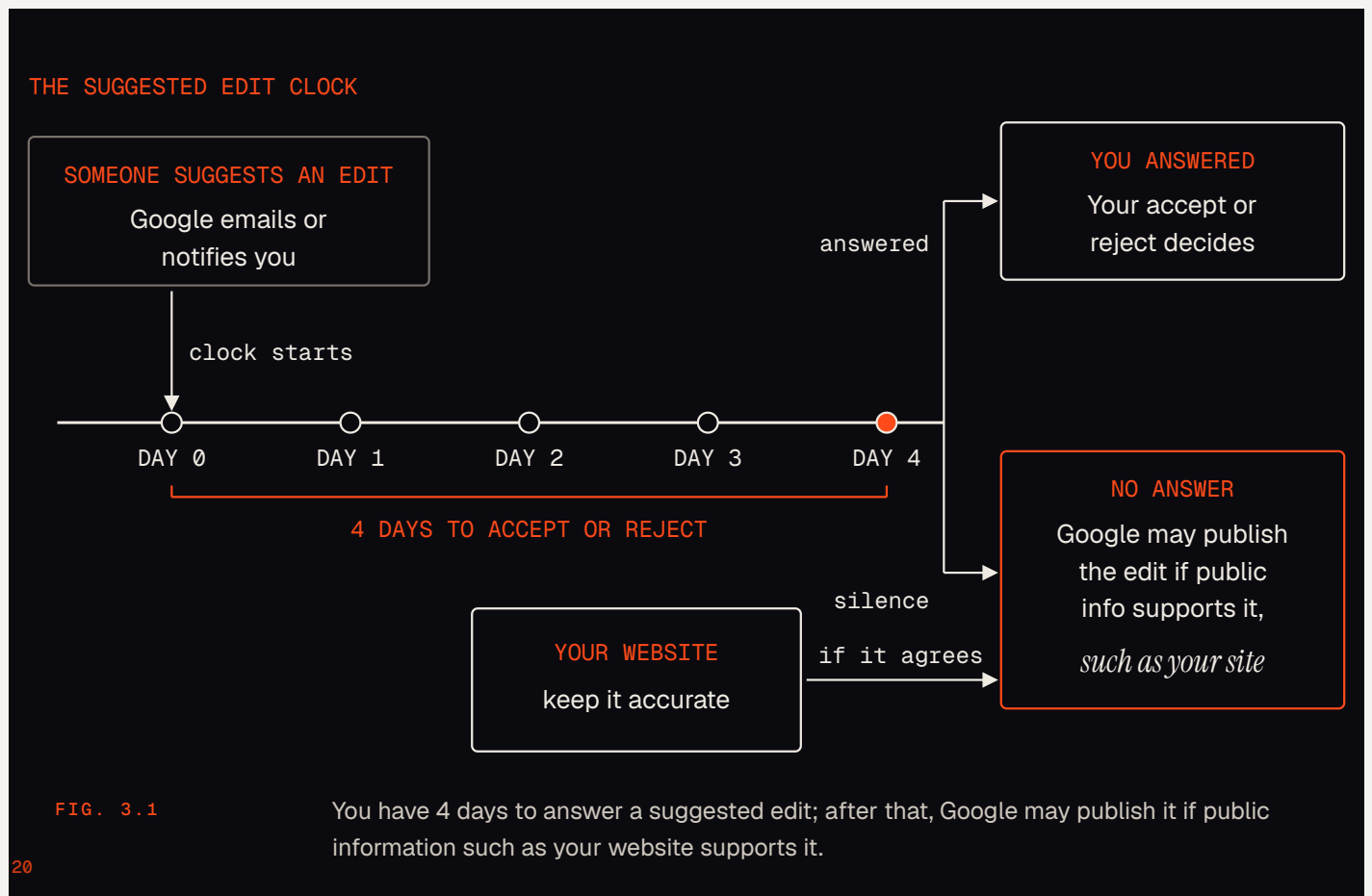
Fix the mismatch. If not, change the profile, or change the real world first (a new sign, a staffed desk) and then the profile.

03

Write it down. Record each final value on the build sheet below and on the One Truth Sheet in Chapter 7.

04

Match again after any change. A move, a new phone line or new hours starts the match over, sheet first.



METHOD

The Monday Fifteen

- 01** **Edits, 3 minutes.** Open the profile, look for Google updates and suggested edits, and answer each one; the clock is 4 days.²⁰
- 02** **Reviews, 5 minutes.** Reply to new reviews within your written standard (Chapter 5).
- 03** **Photos, 3 minutes.** Add two or three new photos of real work from the past week.
- 04** **Hours, 1 minute.** Set special hours for any holiday or closure in the next two weeks.²³
- 05** **Post, 3 minutes.** Publish or schedule one post about something real.³¹ The minutes are our suggestion; the weekly habit is the point.

EXAMPLE

A two-dentist practice in Plano

Over the years the profile name had grown to include "best family dentist" and the city, while the sign out front carries only the practice's two-word name. The name now matches the sign.³ The primary category is Dentist. Both dentists see patients and can be reached at the office during its hours, so each may have a practitioner profile carrying only the dentist's own name, while the practice keeps its own profile. Hygienists and front desk staff do not get profiles.³ New photos of the real team and rooms finish the job.

CHECKLIST

7 ITEMS

- ☐ **Owner:** The business owns the profile, outside help is a manager, and every account with access uses 2-Step Verification.^{26 25}
- ☐ **Owner:** The name matches the sign exactly.³
- ☐ **Owner:** The primary category is the most specific fit, and every extra passes the "IS a" test.^{3 17}
- ☐ **Owner:** Every field on the build sheet passes the Real-World Match.
- ☐ **Office:** Hours are set, or left off if you work by appointment only.³
- ☐ **Office:** Logo, cover photo and real photos of the sign, entrance, team and finished work are uploaded.
- ☐ **Office:** The Monday Fifteen is on the calendar, with a named person.

Profile build sheet

Tick each field when the profile matches the real world.

FIELD	GOOGLE'S RULE	SAYS NOW	SHOULD SAY	DONE
Name	The name on your sign, nothing added ³			
Primary category	The most specific fit ¹⁷			
More categories	As few as possible, "IS a" test ³			
Services	No prices or phone numbers in names ¹⁸			
Description	750 characters or fewer, no links ²³			
Hours	Customer-facing; none if by appointment only ³			
Phone	Connects to this location ³			
Website	The location's page, tagged ²¹			
Address or area	See Chapter 4 ³³			
Photos	JPG or PNG, in focus, no heavy filters ³⁰			

CHAPTER 3 · IN SHORT

-
- 01 The business owns the profile. Helpers are managers.²⁶
-
- 02 The name matches the sign. Keywords in it risk suspension.³
-
- 03 Answer suggested edits within 4 days, and keep your website accurate.²⁰
-

NEXT · CHAPTER 4

Service areas and addresses

38

04

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Service areas and *addresses*

Whether your address shows on Google follows from how you serve customers, not from taste. By the end of this chapter you will know which kind of business you are, whether your address belongs on Google, and how to set a service area if it does not.

4.1

Three kinds of business, and one that does not qualify

A storefront serves customers at its address. A service-area business visits or delivers to customers and does not serve them at its address.³³ A hybrid does both, such as an auto repair shop with a garage that also offers roadside service.³ A hybrid without permanent signage on site is not eligible as a storefront and should be listed as a service-area business.³³ A business that never meets customers in person, at its place or theirs, is not eligible for a profile at all.⁹

4.2

Address rules

If you show an address, it must be a physical place customers can visit.³ Profiles that use a P.O. Box as the business address are suspended.³⁴ Virtual offices are not eligible, and a co-working office qualifies only with clear signage, customers received during business hours and staff present during business hours.³ A business that shows an address should keep permanent fixed signage with its name at that address.³

4.3

Service-area rules

If you do not serve customers at your address, remove it from your profile.³³ You can set up to 20 service areas by city, postal code or other area, and you cannot set a radius around your business.³³ Google says the whole area should stay within about 2 hours of driving from your base, though some businesses may justify more.³ Service area edits can take up to 48 hours to show.³³

4.4

One profile or several

A service-area business gets one profile for the whole area it serves.³³

The exception: a service business with different locations, each with its own service area and its own staff, may have one profile for each location.³ Never create more than one profile for the same location, in one account or across accounts.³

4.5

What a service area does not do

A service area tells customers where you work. It does not cancel distance, which Google measures from the searcher,¹ so listing 20 cities does not put you in 20 places at once. Our reading, not Google's: reach in a far town comes from reviews by customers there, pages about real work there and local links, which the next three chapters cover.

EXAMPLE

A roofing company run from the owner's home in Wylie

The profile showed the owner's home address and a wide radius set years ago. Crews travel to every job and customers never come to the house, so the Front Door Test says service-area business. The owner hides the address and lists the 14 cities where crews worked last year, the farthest well under two hours away. Pages come later, only for the five cities with enough real jobs and photos to fill them. All numbers in this example are for illustration.

METHOD

The Front Door Test

- 01 **Meet in person.** Do you meet customers in person during the hours you list, at your place or theirs? If never, you are not eligible for a Business Profile.⁹
- 02 **Go to them.** Do you travel to customers or deliver to them where they are? Write down yes or no.
- 03 **They come to you.** Do customers come to this address? Write down yes or no.
- 04 **Ready for visitors.** Are staff there during the hours you list, and is there a permanent sign with your name? If either answer is no, the address is not ready to show.³
- 05 **Read the box.** Customers come to a ready address and you never travel: storefront. Both: hybrid, so show the address and a service area.³³ You travel, but customers do not come to a ready address: service-area business, so hide the address.³³ Neither: fix the sign or the staffing before you show an address.³

EXAMPLE

Two other answers to the Front Door Test

A two-bay auto repair shop in Garland keeps staff at the counter during its listed hours, has its name on a permanent sign, and also runs a tow and roadside service. Customers come to a ready address and the shop goes to them: hybrid. It shows the address and lists the cities its tow truck covers.

A pediatric dental office in Allen sees every patient at the office and never travels. During a remodel its sign came down. The test says the address is not ready, and a service area is no answer, because the office does not go to patients. The practice puts the permanent sign back up and stays a storefront with its address shown.



Service area planner

Up to 20 areas you really serve. Measure drive time yourself.

AREA (CITY OR ZIP)	DRIVE TIME FROM BASE	JOB LAST YEAR	REAL PAGE ON OUR SITE?	PRIORITY

AREA (CITY OR ZIP)	DRIVE TIME FROM BASE	JOBS LAST YEAR	REAL PAGE ON OUR SITE?	PRIORITY

CHAPTER 4 · IN SHORT

“*A service area tells customers where you work. It does not move you closer to them.*”

-
- 01 How you serve customers decides whether your address shows.³³
-
- 02 Up to 20 areas, no radius, about 2 hours of driving at most.³³³
-
- 03 A service area does not beat distance. Proof in each area does.¹
-

05

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Reviews from every customer

Reviews are the part of local search your customers write for you. Here is how to ask everyone, reply well and handle bad, fake and extortion reviews, inside Google's rules and federal law.

5.1

Why reviews matter

Google names review count and positive ratings as part of prominence,¹ and says Ask Maps draws on reviews when it answers questions about places.³⁵ Three sets of rules govern how you ask for them: Google's, the FTC's and Yelp's.

5.2

The rules, side by side

§ RULE

What Google prohibits

Google treats paid or rewarded reviews as fake engagement. Merchants may not discourage negative reviews or selectively ask for positive ones, should not pressure customers to review on the premises or ask for specific content, and may not give staff review quotas.⁴ Reviews from current or former employees, family members or competitors are not allowed.⁴ A business that breaks these rules can be blocked from new reviews, have reviews unpublished, or get a public warning on its profile.³⁶

§ RULE

What federal law says

The FTC's rule on consumer reviews and testimonials took effect on October 21, 2024, and courts can impose civil penalties for knowing violations.⁵ It bans creating, selling or buying fake reviews, including AI-generated ones, and incentives conditioned on a particular sentiment.³⁷ It also bans insider reviews that do not clearly disclose the connection, unfounded legal threats or intimidation to suppress reviews, and buying or selling fake social media indicators such as bot followers.³⁷ The rule itself does not ban a reward for an honest review, but the FTC says failing to disclose it could violate the FTC Act.⁵

§

RULE

Your contracts, and Yelp

The Consumer Review Fairness Act makes standard contract terms that restrict, penalize or claim copyright over honest reviews illegal; check your intake forms and online terms.³⁸ Yelp tells businesses not to ask anyone for reviews, and its software may not recommend reviews that look prompted.³⁹

TABLE 5.1 5 ROWS

PRACTICE	GOOGLE	FTC	YELP
Ask every customer the same way	Allowed, with no incentive ⁴	Avoids the selective asking the FTC warns against ⁶	Do not ask anyone ³⁹
Reward for leaving any review	Not allowed ⁴	Not banned by the rule unless tied to sentiment; the FTC says the review should disclose the reward ^{5 6}	Not allowed ³⁹
Reward for a 5-star review	Not allowed ⁴	Banned, even if disclosed ⁵	Not allowed ³⁹
Ask only happy customers	Not allowed ⁴	Could violate the FTC Act ⁵	Do not ask anyone ³⁹
Reviews from staff or family	Not allowed ⁴	Only with the connection clearly disclosed, and even then risky if they lift your rating ^{5 6}	Do not ask them ³⁹

!

WARNING

Lawyers, doctors and dentists, check first

Your state bar or licensing board may have its own rules on testimonials and on what you may say about a client or patient. Check them before you build the ask, and again before you write your reply standard.

5.3

The ask

Same moment, same words, every customer. Create the link or QR code from your profile under Read reviews, then Get more reviews; for now, QR codes can be made only in a computer browser.⁴⁰ Google suggests putting the link on receipts, in thank-you emails, at the end of a chat and on a printed QR code in your store.⁴⁰ Reviewers must be signed in to a Google Account, which can use any email address.⁴¹ A card on the counter is fine; standing over a customer with a tablet is the on-premises pressure Google rules out.⁴

TIP

Three requests that stay inside the rules

Text: "Thanks for choosing us today. If you have a minute, we'd value an honest review on Google: [link]"

Email: "Thank you for your visit. We read every review and use them to get better. If you're willing, leave an honest one here: [link]"

In person: "We ask every customer for an honest review. This card has the link if you'd like to leave one later."

None suggests a star rating, words, a service or a staff name.

5.4

Replies

Google's advice: keep replies short, professional and not promotional, and do not send the same thank-you to everyone. For negative reviews, protect the customer's privacy, explain honestly what you can and cannot do, apologize when appropriate, make it personal and respond promptly.⁴¹ You must be verified to reply. Google checks replies against its policies, usually within 10 minutes but sometimes up to 30 days, and the reviewer is notified and can still change the review.²⁸

Medical, dental and legal practices: never confirm that the reviewer is a patient or client, and keep every detail of their care or case off the page. That follows from Google's privacy advice,⁴¹ and the federal health privacy regulator has settled with a dental practice whose replies to online reviews disclosed patients' health information.⁴²

TABLE 5.2 4 ROWS

REVIEW	A STARTING REPLY YOU PERSONALIZE
Five stars	"Thank you. [One specific thing from their review.] We're glad it went the way it should."
Four stars with a nitpick	"Thank you. You're right about [the issue], and we've [what changed]."
One star, real complaint	"We're sorry. That is not our standard. Please call [name, role] at [number] so we can make it right."
One star, no record of the customer	"We can't find a visit that matches this. Please call [number] so we can look into it." Flag it if it breaks policy.

5.5

Bad, fake and extortion reviews

Google removes only reviews that break its policies, and asks owners not to report a review just because they disagree with it.⁴³ Flag it and track it in the Reviews Management Tool, where evaluation typically takes several days; if Google finds no violation, you get a one-time appeal covering up to 10 reviews.⁴³ The FTC, for its part, warns businesses not to misuse report buttons against honest negative reviews.⁶

Extortion follows a pattern: a sudden run of 1-star and 2-star reviews, then a demand for money, goods or services to remove them.⁴⁴ Do not engage or pay, gather evidence right away, and use the merchant extortion report form.⁴⁴ In April 2026, Google said that when it sees a sudden spike in spam reviews, it removes them, pauses new reviews on the profile, alerts the owner and shows consumers a banner explaining the pause.³²

5.6

Reviews on your own website

Show real reviews on your site for the people reading it, but do not expect stars in search from them. When a business controls the reviews about itself, its pages with LocalBusiness or Organization markup are not eligible for review stars, and ratings copied from other sites do not belong in review markup.⁴⁵

METHOD

The Every Customer Loop

01

Finish the job. The ask is part of closing every job.

02

Ask everyone. Same day, same words, same link, every customer. No filters.

03

Remind once. One reminder a few days later if you hear nothing, then stop. This is our recommendation, not a platform rule.

04

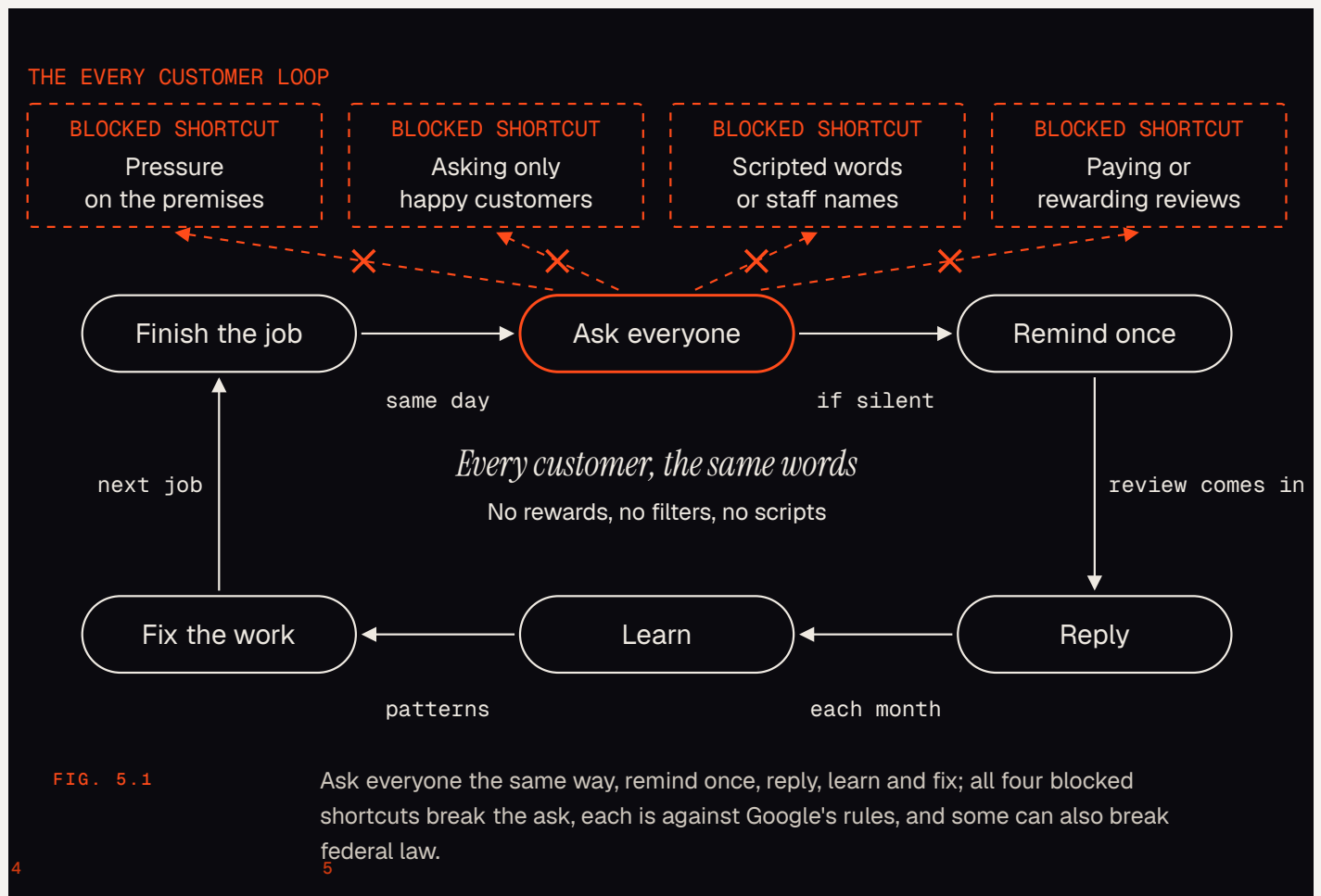
Reply. To every negative review, and to positive ones where you can add something, within a written standard. We suggest two business days.

05

Learn. Once a month, tag what customers praise and what they complain about.

06

Fix the work. Change the operation, not the wording of the ask. The next job starts the loop again.

**EXAMPLE***A family law firm in Dallas answers a one-star review*

A one-star review says the firm "never called back." The first draft reply read: "We checked your file, and we called you twice about your custody hearing." That confirms the person was a client and discloses case details.

The reply the firm posted: "We take every concern seriously and we're sorry to hear this. Our standard is to return calls within one business day. Please call our office manager at our main number so we can look into it." It confirms nothing and moves the conversation off the page.

☐ CHECKLIST

7 ITEMS

- ☐ **Office:** Review link and QR code created.⁴⁰
- ☐ **Owner:** One request each for text, email and in person, none suggesting content.⁴
- ☐ **Office:** Every customer asked, not a chosen few.⁴⁶
- ☐ **Owner:** No rewards tied to reviews anywhere, including staff contests.⁴
- ☐ **Owner:** Intake forms and terms checked for clauses that restrict honest reviews.³⁸
- ☐ **Office:** No requests for Yelp reviews.³⁹
- ☐ **Owner:** A written reply standard, and extortion steps saved where the team can find them.⁴⁴

Your ask plan

Write the exact words for each channel, when each goes out and who sends it.

CHANNEL	WHEN IT GOES OUT	EXACT WORDS	WHO SENDS IT
Text			
Email			
In person			
Printed card			
Reminder			

NOTES

CHAPTER 5 · IN SHORT

“*One ask, one link, every customer.*”

-
- 01 Ask every customer the same way. Never pay, filter or script. ⁴⁵
-
- 02 Reply to protect privacy; in medical, dental and legal work, never confirm a patient or client. ^{41 42}
-
- 03 Report only reviews that break policy, and never pay an extortionist. ^{43 44}
-

06

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A website that *proves* it

Your profile says what you are. Your website proves it. You need a page for each core service and each real location, built to help the person reading it, and LocalBusiness structured data that states the same facts as your profile.

6.1

Why your site matters for local

Google reads your website to detect your categories,³ to settle suggested edits you ignore²⁰ and to compile profile facts.¹⁹ Its AI features link only to pages that are indexed and eligible for a snippet, and robots.txt rules for Googlebot govern crawling for Search and AI features alike.¹¹ Make sure yours lets Google in; Chapter 9 shows how to check.

6.2

Service pages

Give each core service its own page, written for a customer deciding whether to call. Cover what it is, the signs they need it, how the job goes, what affects the price, proof from real jobs and one clear action. Google says it has no preferred word count.⁴⁶ Write until the questions are answered, then stop.

6.3

Location pages

Give each real location its own page, and point that location's profile website link to it, tagged as in Chapter 2. In your markup, the url for each location is the address of that location's own page.⁷

6.4

Area pages without doorways

Google's spam policies name the old shortcuts. Many pages aimed at specific cities or regions that funnel people to one page are doorway abuse.⁸ A block of text listing the towns you want to rank in is keyword stuffing.⁸ Using generative AI to produce many pages that add nothing for users is scaled content abuse.⁸ Our recommendation: publish an area page only when you can fill it with real work from that area.

METHOD

The Proof Page

-
- | | |
|-------|--|
| 01 | Plain headline. Name the service and the place the way a customer would say them. |
| <hr/> | |
| 02 | Where and when. Address or area served, hours and phone, exactly as on your profile. |
| <hr/> | |
| 03 | The work. What you do here, in plain words. |
| <hr/> | |
| 04 | Proof. Real job photos and short notes on real jobs from this area. |
| <hr/> | |
| 05 | What customers say. Reviews from this area, shown as text. |
| <hr/> | |
| 06 | The people. Who does the work, with names and photos if they agree. |
| <hr/> | |
| 07 | Real questions. Answers in plain text, not inside images. |
| <hr/> | |
| 08 | One action. Call, book or get directions. If blocks 3 to 6 cannot be filled with real local material, the page waits. |
-

6.5

LocalBusiness structured data

Structured data states your facts in a standard vocabulary that search engines can read. For a local business, Google requires name and address, and recommends geo, openingHoursSpecification, telephone, url, priceRange, department and menu.⁷ Define each location as its own LocalBusiness, using the most specific subtype possible.⁷

Schema.org's subtypes include Dentist, LegalService, MedicalBusiness and RealEstateAgent;⁴⁷ Plumber, HVACBusiness and RoofingContractor under HomeAndConstructionBusiness;⁴⁸ and AutoRepair under AutomotiveBusiness.⁴⁹ Law firms should use LegalService, because schema.org marks the older Attorney type as deprecated.⁵⁰

Make the markup match the text visitors see,¹¹ and test it with Google's Rich Results Test; sites that break the guidelines can get a manual action.⁷ Google says no special schema or AI text files are needed for its AI features.¹¹ `areaServed` is schema.org vocabulary for the area you serve,⁴⁷ but Google's LocalBusiness documentation does not list it, so do not expect it to change your Google results.⁷

If you hide your address. Google lists the address as a required property, and markup without its required properties is not eligible to show as a rich result.⁷ So a service-area business gains little from LocalBusiness markup on Google. Never publish in markup an address you hide on your profile; describe your service area in plain text on the page instead.

TIP**Give this to whoever manages your site**

Three lines to forward. One: add LocalBusiness markup to each location page, using the most specific type and replacing every value in the sample below. Two: make every value match the text on that page and the Business Profile exactly. Three: test each page in Google's Rich Results Test and send a screenshot of the result.⁷

EXAMPLE*Markup for one plumbing location page*

Placeholder values for a shop customers visit. Replace every value, match it to the page and profile, and validate.

```
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "Plumber",
  "name": "Your Business Name",
  "url": "https://www.example.com/plano/",
  "telephone": "+1-972-555-0100",
  "address": {
    "@type": "PostalAddress",
    "streetAddress": "100 Example Street",
    "addressLocality": "Plano",
    "addressRegion": "TX",
    "postalCode": "75000",
    "addressCountry": "US"
  },
  "geo": {
    "@type": "GeoCoordinates",
    "latitude": 33.01984,
    "longitude": -96.69889
  },
  "openingHoursSpecification": {
    "@type": "OpeningHoursSpecification",
    "dayOfWeek": ["Monday", "Tuesday", "Wednesday",
                  "Thursday", "Friday"],
    "opens": "08:00",
    "closes": "17:00"
  }
}
</script>
```

6.6

The details that convert

Put the same name, address or area, and phone in your footer as on your profile. Make phone numbers tap to call. Keep forms short and track each submission as a key event.²² Show hours and, for a storefront, a directions link.

The five-second phone test. Open each location page on a phone, look for five seconds and do not scroll. Can you see your name, the town or area you serve, and a button to call or book? If any of the three is

missing, move it up. Then ask someone who has never seen the site to do the same.

EXAMPLE

A three-bay auto repair shop in McKinney

An old website had forty near-identical pages, one per nearby town. The owner retires them and redirects each one, so anyone who opens an old address lands on the most useful real page instead. The shop keeps one location page and builds six service pages, from brakes to fleet work, each with photos from its own bays and notes on real jobs. The location page uses AutoRepair markup,⁴⁹ its url is the page itself, and the profile's website link points to it with campaign tags. All numbers in this example are for illustration.

☐ CHECKLIST

7 ITEMS

- ☐ **Web person:** A page for each core service.

- ☐ **Web person:** A page for each real location, linked from its profile.⁷

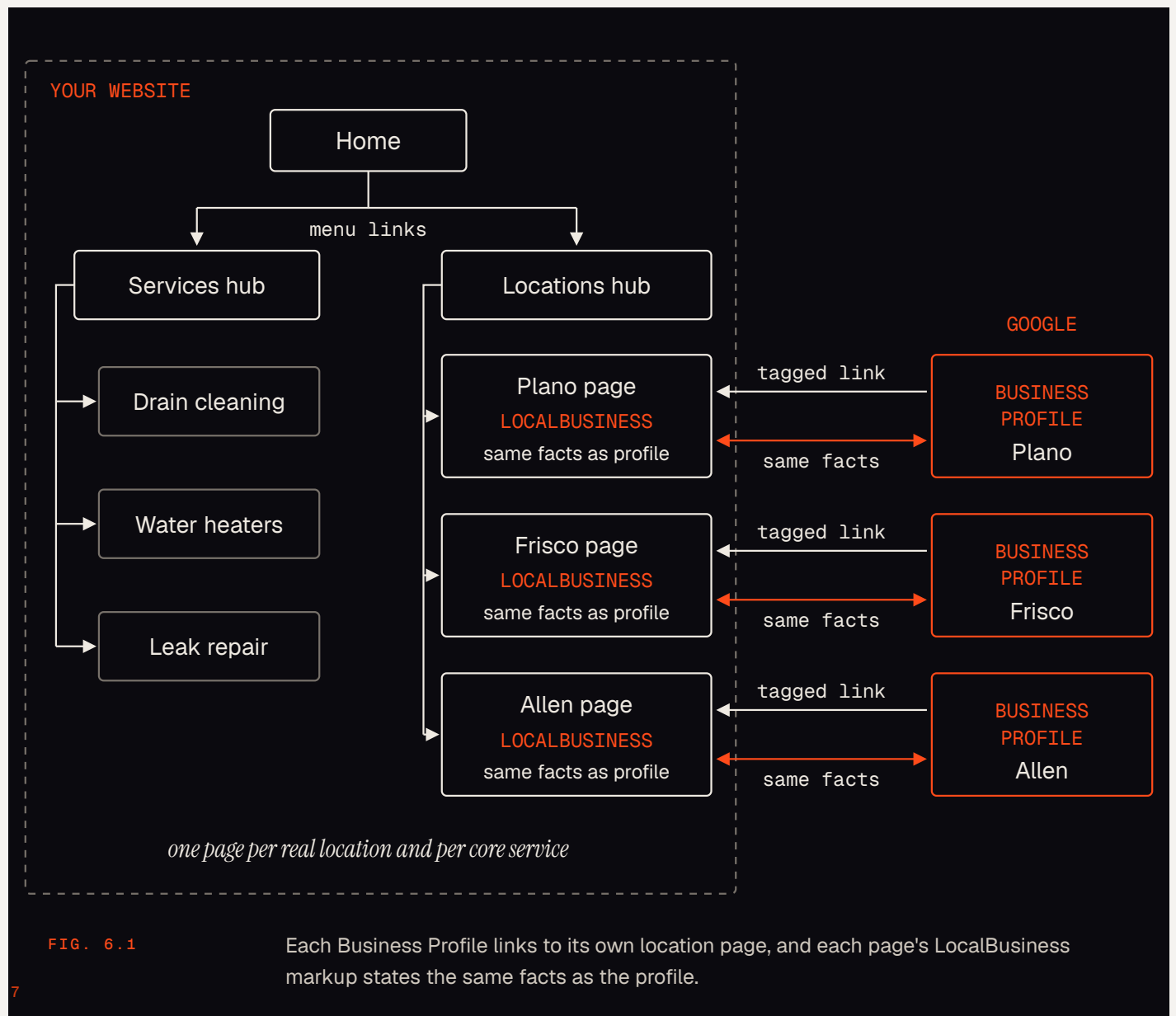
- ☐ **Web person:** No city-swap pages and no blocks of town names.⁸

- ☐ **Web person:** LocalBusiness markup on each location page, most specific type, url set to that page, and no hidden address in it.^{7 47}

- ☐ **Web person:** Markup matches the visible text and passes the Rich Results Test.^{11 7}

- ☐ **Owner:** Every location page passes the five-second phone test.

- ☐ **Web person:** Forms and click-to-call taps tracked as key events.²²



Proof page planner

Use one sheet per page. If you cannot fill rows 3 to 6 with real local material, the page waits.

BLOCK	WHAT WE HAVE	WHAT WE STILL NEED	OWNER	DUE
1. Plain headline				
2. Where and when				
3. The work				
4. Proof				
5. What customers say				
6. The people				
7. Real questions				
8. One action				

NOTES

CHAPTER 6 · IN SHORT

“*If you cannot fill a page with real local work, you do not need the page.*”

-
- 01 One page per core service and per real location, each filled with real local proof.⁷⁸
-
- 02 Markup states what the page already says.¹¹
-
- 03 Your own reviews will not earn stars through your markup.⁴⁵
-

07

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Be *known* around town

Google builds its picture of your business from your profile and from everywhere else you are listed. Here is how to make the outside match the inside, and how to earn links without buying them.

7.1

Why the rest of the web matters

Google compiles profiles partly from public web content and data licensed from third parties,¹⁹ and may update your profile from other sources such as user reports and licensed content.²⁰ It also counts links to your website as part of prominence.¹ An old phone number on a forgotten listing is exactly the kind of outside information that can end up back on your profile.

7.2

Citations and NAP

A citation is any listing of your business name, address and phone number on another site: a directory, an association page, a map app. NAP is shorthand for those three facts. Be clear about why they matter. Google's page on local ranking does not name citations or directories as a factor.¹ It does say that links to your website count toward prominence, so a listing that links to your site is also a link.¹ And Google builds your profile partly from outside sources and may update it from them.^{19 20} The point of citation work is accuracy: every listing that disagrees with you is a chance for a wrong fact to reach your profile.

Pick one format and copy it. One way to write the name, exactly as on the sign. One address format, with Suite spelled the same way every time. One phone pattern. Either "and" or "&," never both. Then paste from the One Truth Sheet instead of retyping.

Find what is already out there. Search the web for each old phone number, each old address and each old name, one at a time, and for your name with your city. Record every listing you find on the audit sheet below.

7.3

The One Truth Sheet

Before you touch a single listing, write down one version of the truth, using the worksheet below. Google asks for the name you use in the real world, on your sign, website and stationery,³ and for a single, authoritative phone number and website.⁹ Share the sheet with everyone who edits a listing, and when anything changes, change the sheet first.

7.4

The listings that matter most

TABLE 7.1 6 ROWS

LISTING	WHAT IT DOES FOR YOU	YOUR MOVE
Google Business Profile	Search, Maps and Google's AI features (Chapters 3 and 9)	Build it with the Real-World Match
Apple Business	Apple Business Connect is now part of Apple Business. ⁵¹ A place card appears in Maps, Siri, Calendar, Messages and Spotlight, and can carry showcases. ⁵²	Claim a place card for each physical location; a business without one can add its brand to Apple Business instead ⁵²
Bing Places for Business	Free listings for Bing search and Bing Maps, now at bing.com/forbusiness ⁵³	Claim it, or import your listing from Google, including name, hours and contact details ⁵³
Yelp	A review site with its own rules about asking for reviews ³⁹	Claim and correct it, but never ask for Yelp reviews ³⁹
Facebook and Nextdoor	Business pages your neighbors see	Match every fact to the One Truth Sheet
Your industry	The listings customers in your trade check (see the next table)	Claim the ones your customers actually use

TABLE 7.2 7 ROWS

INDUSTRY	WHERE TO LOOK
Home services	Your state licensing board's lookup; manufacturer dealer and installer finders
Legal	Your state bar's member directory
Medical and dental	Your state licensing board's lookup; the provider directories of the health insurers you accept
Automotive	Manufacturer and parts supplier locators
Real estate	Your association's member directory and your brokerage's agent pages
Restaurants	The reservation and delivery apps you use
Private schools	Your accrediting body's directory and your state's education directory

7.5

Cleaning up

Fix what you control, ask each site to fix what you do not, and close duplicates; on Google, one location gets one profile.³ A listings management service can push your facts to many directories at once. If you use one, feed it the One Truth Sheet and keep your own login to every listing that matters.

7.6

Local links, the honest way

Links count toward prominence,¹ but Google's spam policies treat buying or selling links, trading goods or services for links, excessive link swaps and low-quality directory links as link spam.⁸ A paid link, such as a sponsor listing, should carry rel="sponsored".¹⁰ The sponsorship still puts your name in front of the neighborhood.

See who links to you now. Search Console's Links report shows the sites that link to you most and your most linked pages. Google says it is a sample, not a complete list, and its tables stop at 1,000 rows.⁵⁴

TABLE 7.3 3 ROWS

PLAY	THE MOVE	WHAT TO SAY
A sponsorship you would back anyway	A team, school event or charity run near a location. Ask that the sponsors page link to that location's page, marked sponsored. ¹⁰	"We're glad to sponsor. Could our listing on your sponsors page link to our [town] page? Your web person can mark it as a sponsored link."
A locator you qualify for	Manufacturers and suppliers list certified dealers and installers. If you qualify, ask to be added, with the exact facts from your One Truth Sheet.	"We install your equipment and hold your certification. Please add us to your dealer finder with this name, address and phone."
A local news tip	Offer a reporter a real, timely story from your work: a storm cleanup, a safety warning, a community project.	"We repaired [number] hail-damaged roofs in [town] this week. Here are three things homeowners should check before they call their insurer."

7.7

Community presence

Prominence is how well known a business is.¹ Be known for something specific where your customers already are, such as the school fundraiser or the neighborhood cleanup, then document it with photos, a profile post and a page on your site.

METHOD

The Four Rings

01

Ring 1, core platforms. Google, Apple Maps, Bing, Yelp and Facebook, claimed and matching the One Truth Sheet.

02

Ring 2, industry and data listings. License lookups, associations, dealer finders and trade directories. The same facts.

03

Ring 3, community. Sponsors, schools, charities, chambers and events. Real ties that earn links and mentions.

04

Ring 4, earned mentions. Local news, blogs and lists that mention you because you earned it.

05

Work from the center out. Do not chase ring 4 while ring 1 is wrong.

EXAMPLE

A Richardson restaurant that changed its phone number

The restaurant changed phone numbers, but the old one still lived on several directories. Weeks later, someone suggested the old number on Google. The owner missed the email, the 4-day window passed,²⁰ and the old number went live. The fix, in order: the One Truth Sheet, the Google profile, then Apple Maps, Bing, Yelp and Facebook, then every ring 2 directory. The Monday Fifteen now starts with suggested edits.

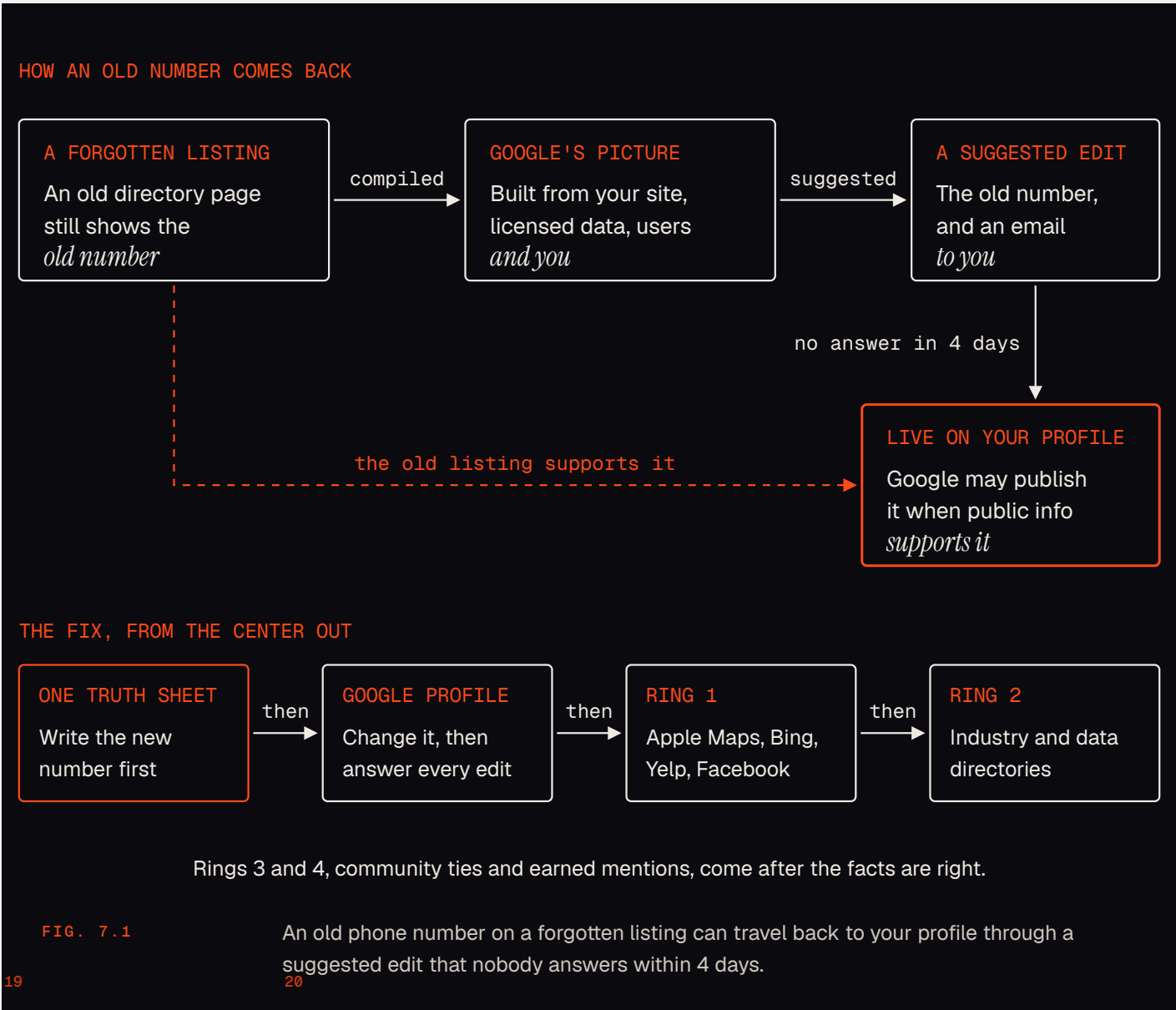
CHECKLIST

8 ITEMS

- ☐ **Owner:** One Truth Sheet written and shared with everyone who edits a listing.
- ☐ **Office:** Apple Business place card claimed for each physical location, or your brand added if you have none.⁵²
- ☐ **Office:** Bing Places listing claimed or imported.⁵³

CONTINUED

- ☐ **Office:** Yelp page claimed and corrected.³⁹
- ☐ **Office:** Facebook and Nextdoor facts match the sheet.
- ☐ **Office:** The listings for your industry checked.
- ☐ **Office:** Old phone numbers, addresses and names searched and fixed.
- ☐ **Web person:** Links report checked, and two local link plays started this quarter, paid ones marked sponsored.⁵⁴¹⁰



One Truth Sheet

One value per line, written exactly as it should appear everywhere. The middle column shows the kind of choice to make.

FACT	SAMPLE CHOICE	OUR ONE TRUTH
Legal name (for your records)	Company name with LLC, kept off public listings unless it is on the sign	
Public name, as on the sign	The sign's exact words, with "&" or "and" as the sign has it	
Street address, or "service-area business"	100 Example Street, Suite 200, Plano, TX 75000	
Service areas	Plano, Frisco, Allen, in the same order everywhere	
Main phone	(972) 555-0100, the number that rings the office	
Website	https://www.example.com/plano/	
Hours	Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	
Primary category	Plumber	
Short description	The first sentence of your profile description	

Listings audit

Write each listing's web address under its name, then tick each fact that matches the One Truth Sheet.

LISTING AND WEB ADDRESS	NAME OK	ADDRESS OK	PHONE OK	HOURS OK
Google				
Apple Business				
Bing Places				
Yelp				
Facebook				
Nextdoor				

CHAPTER 7 • IN SHORT

-
- 01 Citation work is about accuracy: wrong facts travel back to your profile.¹⁹²⁰
-
- 02 Write the One Truth Sheet first, and change it before anything else.³⁹
-
- 03 Earn local links, mark paid ones sponsored, and never buy links to rank.¹⁰⁸
-

NEXT • CHAPTER 8

*Many locations, one **system***

75

08

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Many locations, one *system*

With more than one location, local search becomes a system. The center keeps control and consistency; every location still earns its own local proof. Here is how a chain, franchise or multi-office practice sets that up and reads it every month.

8.1

Structure and access

Google recommends a business group for organizations that share management of profiles.⁵⁵ Use one instead of shared passwords. Decide in writing who owns each profile, especially under a franchise agreement, and test the answer against Google's rule: the business keeps ownership or co-ownership, and agencies and other partners are managers.²⁶ A third party must return exclusive control within 7 business days of your notice.²⁶ Claim every location, because Google says unclaimed locations are more vulnerable to hijacking.²⁵

8.2

Bulk verification

Bulk verification is for 10 or more locations of the same business, submitted through Business Profile Manager.⁵⁵ Service-area businesses cannot use it, and agencies with more than one business in one account cannot bulk verify.⁵⁵ Google may ask a business to confirm it exists by video during the process, and may de-verify accounts that do not actively manage their profiles.⁵⁵

8.3

Names, categories and practitioners

Every location uses the same name, unless its real-world branding consistently differs.³ All locations share the category that best represents the business.³ A public-facing department that operates as a distinct entity, typically with its own customer entrance, may have its own profile, with a name and a main category different from the main business.³ Practitioners who work in a public-facing role and can be reached at the location during stated hours may have profiles. Where several share a location, each profile carries only the practitioner's name, the organization keeps its own, and support staff get none.³

8.4

Running the fleet

Three features save hours at scale: bulk photo upload by spreadsheet for 10 or more locations,³⁰ one post published to many profiles at once,³¹ and performance downloads for many locations from Business Profile Manager.¹⁵

8.5

Location pages and a locator

Build one page per location with the Proof Page blocks and one LocalBusiness per location in the markup,⁷ plus a locator page that links to them all. Each profile links to its own page, never the home page.

8.6

Local proof at every location

Standards travel from the center. Proof does not. Each location owns its photos, review replies and community ties; stock photos posted to every profile prove nothing.

8.7

Openings, moves and closures

Write the playbook before you need it. A location that moves must verify again.²³ A business whose identity is tied to the place, such as a restaurant, marks the old profile permanently closed and creates a new one.³⁴ A new business at an old address should not rename the old profile.³⁴ Every new location follows the address rules in Chapter 4 before its profile goes live.

8.8

Reporting

Run the Grid and Ledger for every location. The Google Analytics link sums all linked profiles and cannot split them,¹⁶ so use the Business Profile Manager download for numbers by location.¹⁵

METHOD

Hub and Spoke

01

The hub owns access. One business group, ownership decided in writing, partners as managers.

02

The hub owns the data. A One Truth Sheet per location, one name, one primary category.

03

The hub owns the templates. Page design, markup, photo standards, the reply standard, and the playbook for openings, moves and closures.

04

Each spoke owns the proof. Photos of its own work, replies to its own reviews, its own community ties.

05

Numbers come back monthly. One roster row per location: grid average, calls, leads and booked jobs, set against last month and against the average of all locations. The outlier gets diagnosed first.

HUB AND SPOKE (ILLUSTRATION)



Four of eight offices shown. Grid averages are for illustration.

FIG. 8.1

The hub sends the same standards to every office; each office sends back its local proof and one number, its grid average, so the outlier stands out on the monthly roster. The values are an illustration.

EXAMPLE

An eight-office dental group in North Texas

Each office had been set up by a different manager: the names varied, two offices used a broader primary category, and three profiles linked to the home page. The group sets up one business group, makes the brand owner of all eight profiles and moves its agency to manager.^{55 26} Every office now has the same name, the primary category Dentist, its own page with Dentist markup, and a tagged profile link.

CONTINUED

Three months later, three rows of the roster read like this:

OFFICE	GRID AVERAGE	PROFILE CALLS	WHAT THE HUB FINDS
Office 1	4.1	112	On track
Office 2	5.0	97	On track
Office 3	12.8	41	A site update moved its page, so the profile link now lands on an error page, and it has added no photos in two months

Office 3 gets its profile link fixed and a photo afternoon, and the next roster shows whether it moved. All numbers in this example are for illustration.

CHECKLIST

7 ITEMS

- ☐ **Owner:** Business group created; no shared passwords.⁵⁵
- ☐ **Owner:** Ownership of every profile decided in writing, with the business as owner or co-owner.²⁶
- ☐ **Office:** Every location claimed, to cut the risk of hijacking.²⁵
- ☐ **Office:** Same name and primary category everywhere.³
- ☐ **Web person:** Each location linked to its own page with its own markup.⁷
- ☐ **Owner:** A roster row for every location, every month.¹⁵
- ☐ **Owner:** A written playbook for openings, moves and closures.^{23 34}

Location roster

One row per location, updated monthly.

LOCATION	PROFILE ID	PAGE ADDRESS	LOCAL LEAD	LAST GRID AVERAGE

NOTES

CHAPTER 8 · IN SHORT

-
- | | |
|----|---|
| 01 | The center owns access, data and templates; each location owns its proof. |
| 02 | The same name and category everywhere. ³ |
| 03 | Report by location from the Business Profile Manager download, and fix the outlier first. ¹⁵ |
-

09

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When AI *answers*

Customers can now ask an assistant, such as Ask Maps or Google's AI Mode, and get one short answer instead of a page of links.³⁵¹¹ Separate what the providers document about how those answers are built from what nobody has shown, and make the moves that work either way.

In this chapter every claim is either documented by the provider, with a source mark, or labeled as a hypothesis to test.

9.1

What changed

Google announced Ask Maps on March 12, 2026: a Gemini-powered way to ask Google Maps questions in conversation, rolling out first in the U.S. and India on phones, with desktop to follow.³⁵ That was the launch plan, so check where it is available to your customers today. Google says Ask Maps draws on information from over 300 million places, including reviews, and personalizes answers using places the user has searched for or saved.³⁵ The Gemini app uses public Google Maps information to give businesses' addresses, websites, ratings and hours.¹² AI Overviews and AI Mode may run several related searches, which Google calls query fan-out, to build one answer.¹¹

9.2

What each provider documents

TABLE 9.1 8 ROWS

ASSISTANT OR FEATURE	WHAT THE PROVIDER DOCUMENTS	YOUR LEVER
Google AI Overviews and AI Mode	Supporting links must be indexed and eligible for a snippet; SEO basics still apply; an up-to-date Business Profile is a listed best practice ¹¹	Profile and website
Ask Maps	Draws on Maps information about places, including reviews, and personalizes answers ³⁵	Profile and reviews
Gemini app	Uses public Google Maps information about places ¹²	Profile
ChatGPT search	Sites that block OAI-SearchBot are not shown in ChatGPT search answers ¹³	robots.txt
Perplexity	PerplexityBot surfaces and links websites in its search results ⁵⁶	robots.txt

ASSISTANT OR FEATURE	WHAT THE PROVIDER DOCUMENTS	YOUR LEVER
Claude	Blocking Claude-SearchBot may reduce a site's visibility in search results ⁵⁷	robots.txt
Copilot and Bing	Bing Webmaster Tools reports how a site's content is cited in Copilot and Bing answers ⁵⁸	Website; Bing Places now covers Bing search and Maps, and Bing lists deeper Copilot integration as future work ⁵³
Siri	An Apple Business place card appears in Siri ⁵²	Apple Business

9.3

Hypotheses to test, not facts

We found no provider page that spells out how local businesses are chosen for an answer, and Google says results depend on the time, place, device and history of the person searching.² Common advice about AI answers rests on hunches. Turn each hunch into a test your Answer Audit can run.

Test: does the business named first have the same name, phone and services on every listing you can find?

Test: do the businesses named have more recent and more detailed reviews than you?

Test: do they appear on local lists or in local news where you do not?

Test: when an assistant quotes a page, is the answer written in plain text on that page, not inside an image or behind a form?

9.4

What you can do now

Keep your profile complete and current. Google lists this as a best practice for its AI features, and Gemini reads Maps data directly.^{11 12}

Let the search crawlers in. Allow Googlebot,¹¹ Bingbot,⁵⁹ OAI-SearchBot,¹³ PerplexityBot⁵⁶ and Claude-SearchBot⁵⁷ in robots.txt, then ask your hosting or firewall provider whether a bot-blocking default turns them away anyway. ChatGPT's maker says its search systems can take about 24 hours to adjust after a robots.txt change.¹³

Check your file. Open yourdomain.com/robots.txt in a browser; the file must sit at the root of your site.⁶⁰ Look for a Disallow line that covers your pages under any of those crawlers or under "User-agent: *". If there is no file at all, crawlers are allowed by default.⁶⁰ A file shaped like this one lets the search crawlers in and, as one possible choice, keeps the training crawlers out; each group starts with one or more User-agent lines.⁶⁰ If your file has other rules, have your web person merge them rather than paste over them.

```
# Search crawlers: let them in
User-agent: Googlebot
User-agent: Bingbot
User-agent: OAI-SearchBot
User-agent: PerplexityBot
User-agent: Claude-SearchBot
Allow: /

# Training crawlers: your choice (blocked here)
User-agent: GPTBot
User-agent: ClaudeBot
User-agent: Google-Extended
Disallow: /
```

Ask your host one question. "Do you block Googlebot, Bingbot, OAI-SearchBot, PerplexityBot or Claude-SearchBot by default, at the firewall or in any bot setting?"

Decide about training separately. Blocking a training crawler is a different choice from being found. GPTBot is set independently of OAI-SearchBot,¹³ ClaudeBot is separate from Claude-SearchBot,⁵⁷ and Google-Extended is separate from the Googlebot rules that control Search and its AI features.¹¹

Know the fetchers people trigger. When someone asks a question, an assistant may fetch your page for that person: ChatGPT-User, Perplexity-User or Claude-User. ChatGPT's maker says robots.txt rules may not apply to ChatGPT-User and that it does not decide what appears in search.¹³ Perplexity says Perplexity-User generally ignores robots.txt.⁵⁶ Claude's maker says blocking Claude-User may reduce your visibility in searches people ask Claude to run.⁵⁷ Leave them allowed unless you have a reason.

Put facts in text, and match your markup to it. No AI text files or special markup are needed for Google.¹¹

Claim Apple Business and Bing Places,^{52 53} and earn honest reviews without scripting them.⁴

EXAMPLE

A private school in Allen runs its first Answer Audit

The school asks its ten questions in three assistants and is named for "private school near [neighborhood]" in only one. Two causes turn up: a firewall default was blocking one search crawler, and the grades served and tuition wording on the website differed from the profile and two directories. The school allows the crawler, fixes the facts everywhere, starting with its One Truth Sheet, and removes the hours from its profile, since Google lists schools among businesses that should not provide hours.³ Next month it asks the same questions.

! WARNING

Nobody can guarantee AI placement

Google's third-party policies already forbid guaranteeing top placement on Google.²⁶ Treat any offer of a "guaranteed AI ranking" the same way.

METHOD

The Answer Audit

01

Write ten questions. The ones a customer would ask out loud, such as "who can fix a burst pipe tonight in [suburb]?" or "best pediatric dentist near [neighborhood]?" Keep the list fixed.

02

Pick three assistants. The three your customers use most, such as Google AI Mode, ChatGPT and Siri. Keep them fixed too.

03

Ask the same way each month. From a phone, at a place a customer would be. Budget about 20 minutes for the thirty questions.

04

Log what you see. One cell per question and assistant: your position ("named 2nd") or "not named," plus any source the assistant shows.

05

Check the dashboards. Search Console counts AI Overviews and AI Mode traffic under Web.¹¹ Bing Webmaster Tools has an AI Performance report; its Citation Share view was in preview when Bing announced it in June 2026, and Bing calls citation share an observational metric, not a ranking.⁵⁸

06

Fix one cause, then ask again. A blocked crawler, a fact that does not match, a missing page. This is sampling, not a rank; Google says Ask Maps, for one, personalizes its answers.³⁵

☐ CHECKLIST

7 ITEMS

☐ **Office:** Profile complete and current.¹¹

☐ **Web person:** robots.txt allows Googlebot, Bingbot, OAI-SearchBot, PerplexityBot and Claude-SearchBot.⁶⁰⁵⁹¹³⁵⁶⁵⁷

☐ **Web person:** The host has answered the bot-blocking question in writing.

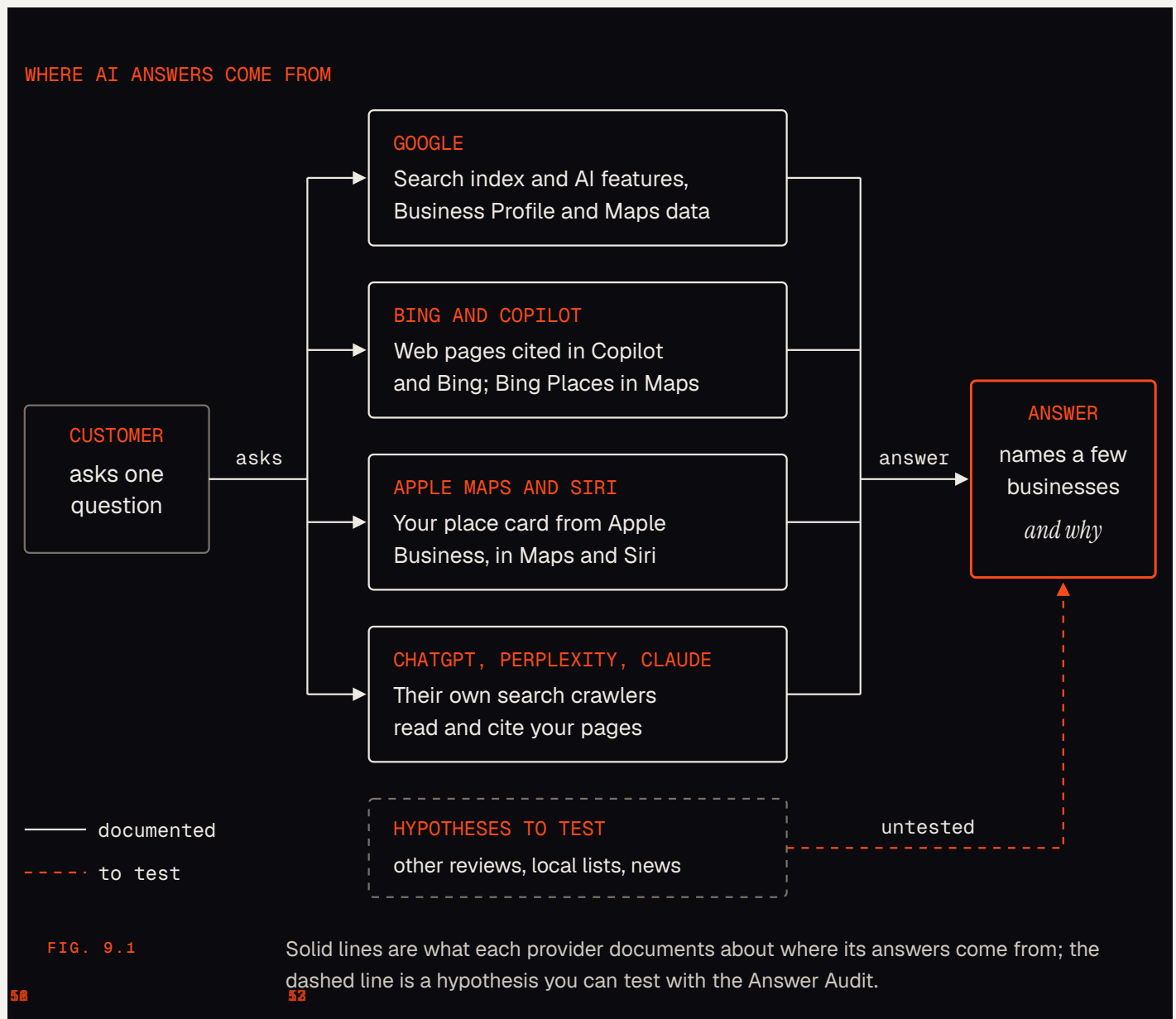
☐ **Owner:** A decision on training crawlers, written down.¹³⁵⁷¹¹

CONTINUED

- ☐ **Web person:** Key facts in page text, with markup that matches.¹¹

- ☐ **Web person:** Bing Webmaster Tools set up.⁵⁸

- ☐ **Owner:** Ten audit questions and three assistants written down, and the first Answer Audit logged.



Answer Audit log

Date of this run: _____. Write your three assistants in the header. In each cell, write your position or "not named."

QUESTION	ASSISTANT 1:	ASSISTANT 2:	ASSISTANT 3:	SOURCES SHOWN

CHAPTER 9 · IN SHORT

-
- 01 Your profile and your website feed Google's AI answers. ^{11 12}
-
- 02 Being found and being used for training are separate switches. ^{13 57 11}
-
- 03 Treat every claim about AI ranking as a test, and run the same audit every month.
-

NEXT · CHAPTER 10

*Stay **safe**: spam, suspensions and appeals*

92

10

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Stay *safe*: spam, suspensions and appeals

A suspended profile disappears when you need it most. Here is what gets profiles in trouble, how to keep yours secure and in your hands, what to do if it is suspended, and how to report competitors who break the rules.

10.1

What gets profiles in trouble

TABLE 10.1 7 ROWS

WHAT YOU DO	WHAT GOOGLE SAYS CAN HAPPEN	WHERE TO FIX IT
Keywords, cities or taglines in the name	Suspension ³	Chapter 3
A P.O. Box as the business address	Suspension ³⁴	Chapter 4
A virtual office as the address	Not eligible ³	Chapter 4
Two profiles for one location	Not allowed ³	Chapters 4 and 7
A lead generation business	Not eligible ⁹	Chapter 3
Fake or paid reviews	A block on new reviews, unpublished reviews or a public warning ³⁶	Chapter 5
A pattern of violations	The account is restricted and every profile on it is suspended ³⁴	This chapter

10.2

Risky edits

Google may reject significant changes to a business name or category.³⁴ A name change after verification may require verifying again,²³ and so may adding or editing a category.¹⁷ Chapter 3 covers what not to touch while a postcard is on its way. Make big changes one at a time, with evidence ready.

10.3

Security and scams

Claim every location, limit access and remove former employees.²⁵ Google does not charge to verify, maintain or reinstate a profile, and it will never ask you for a one-time password or PIN.²⁵ In select regions

and categories, Google does make real automated calls and send texts or WhatsApp messages to your verified number to confirm business details.²³ A real check asks about your business facts; a scam asks for money, codes or access. When in doubt, hang up and open your profile yourself.

10.4

When someone else owns your profile

A former agency or employee may still own the profile. For a storefront or hybrid business, go to business.google.com/add, enter your business name and address, choose your business, select Request Access, then fill out and submit the form.²⁴ The current owner is emailed and has 3 days to respond.²⁴ If you hear nothing after 3 days, you may be able to claim the profile yourself, though that option is not always available.²⁴ A service-area business with no shop or office asks Google support to transfer ownership instead.²⁴

10.5

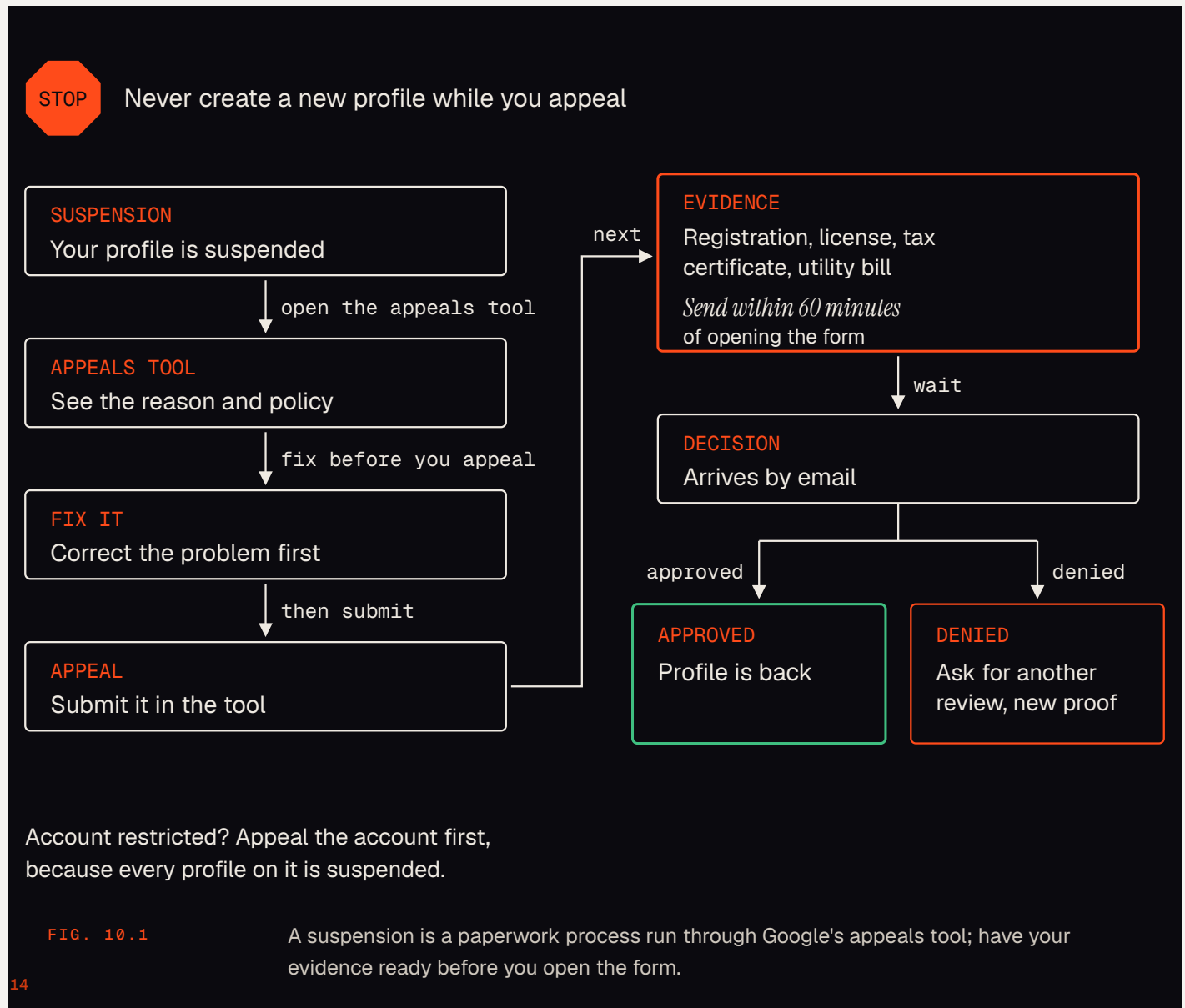
If you are suspended

Follow Google's process, in order.¹⁴ Do not create a new profile while your appeal is under review. Open the appeals tool to see the reason and the policy, fix the problem, and submit the appeal.¹⁴ Add evidence whose name and address match the profile, such as a business registration, license, tax certificate or utility bill.¹⁴ Once you open the evidence form, you have 60 minutes to submit it, or it will not be attached.¹⁴ Then wait for the email. If the appeal is denied, you can request another review with new evidence.¹⁴

60 minutes *to submit your evidence once you open Google's appeal evidence form, so have the folder ready first*

SOURCE 14

If your whole account is restricted, every profile on it is suspended, and you appeal the account restriction first. Appeals for more than 10 profiles can include a spreadsheet of evidence and profile IDs.¹⁴ If your reviews are restricted instead, Google emails you before the restriction applies, and you can appeal it.³⁶



10.6

Reporting spam competitors

If a listing's misleading information makes you believe the business may not exist, report it on Maps: choose Suggest an edit, then Place is closed or not here, then Offensive, harmful, or misleading.⁶¹ Misleading names, phone numbers or web addresses that suggest fraud go through the Business Redressal Complaint form, where you can report several businesses at once with a spreadsheet of their URLs.⁶¹ A business that buys or pressures reviews can be reported through Report business conduct in the Maps app.⁶¹ Keep dated screenshots, and report what you can prove, not everyone who outranks you.

10.7

Extortion

A flood of 1-star reviews followed by a demand for payment is extortion: do not pay, gather evidence and use Google's report form (Chapter 5).⁴⁴

METHOD

The Evidence Folder

01

Collect proof that you exist. Business registration, business license, tax certificate, and a utility bill in the business name at the listed address.¹⁴

02

Photograph the front door. Your permanent sign with the street visible, and the entrance during business hours.

03

Keep the paperwork of place. Your lease or deed.

04

List the keys. Every profile owner and manager, with each profile ID.

05

Review it twice a year. Replace anything expired, and add each new location the day it opens.

EXAMPLE

A real estate team in Frisco

The team added "Homes for Sale" to its profile name, and the profile was suspended. It did not create a new profile. It removed the keywords so the name matched its sign and license, submitted the appeal, attached its brokerage license, business registration and a photo of the office sign inside the 60-minute window, and waited for the email. The profile was reinstated. How long that takes varies; the Evidence Folder made sure paperwork was never the delay.

☐ CHECKLIST

6 ITEMS

- ☐ **Owner:** The name contains nothing but your real name.³
- ☐ **Owner:** Evidence Folder built and stored where two people can reach it.¹⁴
- ☐ **Owner:** Owners list reviewed and former staff removed.²⁵
- ☐ **Owner:** Any profile held by a former agency or employee requested back.²⁴
- ☐ **Office:** Everyone who answers the phone knows Google never charges or asks for codes.²⁵
- ☐ **Office:** Competitor spam documented with dated screenshots before you report it.⁶¹

Evidence folder inventory

Name and address on each document must match the profile.

DOCUMENT	NAME MATCHES?	ADDRESS MATCHES?	STORED WHERE	NEXT REVIEW
Business registration				
Business license				
Tax certificate				
Utility bill				
Sign and entrance photos				
Lease or deed				
Owners, managers and profile IDs				

NOTES

CHAPTER 10 · IN SHORT

“*A suspension is paperwork. A ready folder means you are never the reason it is slow.*”

01 Every risk in the table above is a written rule you can read in advance. ³³⁴

02 Google never charges and never asks for codes. ²⁵

03 Never create a new profile during a suspension. ¹⁴

Your 30, 60, 90 day plan

START DATE _____

Work in order; each week ends with a test for done, and the chapter that holds the method is named in brackets. The three blocks run weeks 1 to 4, 5 to 8 and 9 to 13. Run the Grid and Ledger once a month, in weeks 1, 5, 9 and 13, to fill Month 0 to Month 3 on the baseline sheet.

DAYS 1 TO 30

Foundation

- ☐ **Week 1.** Run the baseline Grid and Ledger. Hand the four website jobs to your web person. Remove former staff from the profile and move any agency to manager. **Done when:** the first grid is saved, a test visit shows under your campaign tag, and the owners list holds only current people. [Chapters 2, 3]
- ☐ **Week 2.** Take the Front Door Test and fix the address or service area. Run the Real-World Match on every field. Build the Evidence Folder. **Done when:** the build sheet is ticked and the folder holds your registration, license and sign photos. [Chapters 3, 4, 10]
- ☐ **Week 3.** Write the One Truth Sheet and fix ring 1: Apple Business, Bing Places, Yelp and Facebook. **Done when:** every ring 1 line on the audit sheet is ticked. [Chapter 7]
- ☐ **Week 4.** Start the Every Customer Loop, write your reply standard, check contracts for review gag clauses and put the Monday Fifteen on the calendar. **Done when:** every customer this week got the same ask. [Chapters 3, 5]

DAYS 31 TO 60

Proof

-
- ☐ **Week 5.** Run the second Grid and Ledger. Start your location pages and top three service pages with the Proof Page blocks. **Done when:** Month 1 is filled and the first page is live. [Chapters 2, 6]

 - ☐ **Week 6.** Finish those pages and add LocalBusiness markup. **Done when:** every page passes the Rich Results Test and the five-second phone test. [Chapter 6]

 - ☐ **Week 7.** Check robots.txt and firewall rules, set up Bing Webmaster Tools, and run the first Answer Audit. **Done when:** your host has answered in writing and the first audit log is filled. [Chapter 9]

 - ☐ **Week 8.** Audit ring 2 listings and clean up old numbers, addresses and duplicates. **Done when:** every listing on the audit sheet is fixed or has a correction request in. [Chapter 7]

DAYS 61 TO 90

Reach

-
- ☐ **Week 9.** Run the third Grid and Ledger. Check the Links report and start two local link plays, paid links marked sponsored. **Done when:** Month 2 is filled and both asks are sent. [Chapters 2, 7]

 - ☐ **Weeks 10 and 11.** Several locations: roll out the system with the location roster. One location: build three more service pages, or area pages where real work exists, and add photos and posts where your grid is weak. **Done when:** the roster has a row per location, or the new pages are live. [Chapters 3, 6, 8]

 - ☐ **Weeks 12 and 13.** Run the fourth Grid and Ledger and the second Answer Audit. Retake the scorecard and choose next quarter's three priorities. **Done when:** the baseline sheet is full and the three priorities are written down. [Chapters 2, 9]

TOOL · SCORE

Score yourself

Score each line 0 (not done), 1 (partly) or 2 (done). Be strict. Any line under 2 tells you which chapter to open. The bands are ours, not a platform's.

	STATEMENT	OPEN	SCORE		
01	The Grid and Ledger ran this month and was compared with last month. ¹⁵	Chapter 2	0	1	2
02	The business owns its Business Profile, access is limited to the people who need it, and outside help is a manager. ^{26 25}	Chapter 3	0	1	2
03	Name, phone and hours match the sign, the website and the One Truth Sheet. ³	Chapter 3	0	1	2
04	The primary category is the most specific fit, every extra passes the "IS a" test, and every core service is on the profile. ^{3 17 18}	Chapter 3	0	1	2
05	The Monday Fifteen ran every week this month, including new photos of real work.	Chapter 3	0	1	2
06	The address shows only if customers come to a staffed, signed address, and the service areas are real and 20 or fewer. ^{33 3}	Chapter 4	0	1	2
07	Every customer is asked for a review the same way, with no rewards, filtering or suggested wording. ⁴⁵	Chapter 5	0	1	2
08	Every review that needs a reply got one within your written standard. ⁴¹	Chapter 5	0	1	2
09	Each location and core service has its own page with real local proof, and each profile links to the right page. ⁷⁸	Chapter 6	0	1	2
10	LocalBusiness markup is valid and matches the page text. ^{7 11}	Chapter 6	0	1	2

	STATEMENT	OPEN	SCORE		
11	Apple Business, Bing Places, Yelp and Facebook match the One Truth Sheet. ^{52 53}	Chapter 7	012		
12	You know who links to you, and at least one honest local link play is under way. ^{54 10}	Chapter 7	012		
13	Several locations: one business group, ownership decided in writing and a monthly roster. One location: score 2. ^{55 26}	Chapter 8	012		
14	Search crawlers are allowed, and the Answer Audit ran in the last 30 days. ^{11 13}	Chapter 9	012		
15	The Evidence Folder is complete, current and reachable by two people. ¹⁴	Chapter 10	012		

Total, out of 30

YOUR TOTAL SAYS

0 to 10: fix the foundation.

Start with your lowest lines in Chapters 2 to 4, then the first 30 days of the plan.

11 to 20: build proof.

Work your lowest lines in Chapters 5 to 7.

21 to 30: extend reach.

Bring every line to 2, work Chapters 8 to 10, and keep the monthly Grid and Ledger running.

WORDS

Glossary

AI Overviews and AI Mode

Google Search features that answer with an AI-written summary and supporting links.¹¹

Business group

A Google Business Profile feature for organizations that share the management of many profiles.⁵⁵

Campaign tag (UTM)

The `utm_source`, `utm_medium` and `utm_campaign` values added to a link so Google Analytics can tell where a visit came from.²¹

Citation

Any listing of your business name, address and phone on another site, such as a directory or an association page.

Distance

How far a business is from the person searching. One of Google's three local factors.¹

Doorway page

A page made to rank for a place or phrase that funnels visitors somewhere else. Google treats it as spam.⁸

Fake engagement

Google's term for reviews and other content that do not reflect a genuine experience, including paid reviews.⁴

Google Business Profile

Google's free listing for a business on Search and Maps.²⁶

Hybrid business

A business that serves customers at its address and also visits or delivers to them. It shows its address and a service area.³³

Key event

An action on your website that Google Analytics counts as important, such as a form submission or a tap to call.²²

LocalBusiness

The schema.org type for a particular physical business or branch of an organization.⁴⁷

Map grid

A set of points across your service area where your rank for one search is checked.

NAP

Name, address and phone: the core facts every listing should share.

Primary category

The one category that best describes what your business is. Categories affect local ranking.¹⁷

Prominence

How well known a business is, based in part on links and reviews. One of Google's three local factors.¹

Relevance

How well a profile matches what someone searched for. One of Google's three local factors.¹

Review gating

Asking only the customers you expect to be happy for reviews. Google does not allow it.⁴

robots.txt

A text file at the root of your website that tells crawlers which pages they may visit. With no file, crawlers are allowed everywhere.⁶⁰

Search crawler

A bot that reads web pages so a search engine or assistant can show and cite them, such as Bingbot or OAI-SearchBot.^{59 13}

Service-area business

A business that visits or delivers to customers, does not serve them at its address, and hides that address.³³

Structured data (JSON-LD)

Code on a page that states facts in a standard vocabulary, such as your name, address and hours, so machines can read them. JSON-LD is the format used in Chapter 6.⁷

Suggested edit

A change to your profile proposed by someone else. You have 4 days to accept or reject it.²⁰

EVIDENCE

Sources

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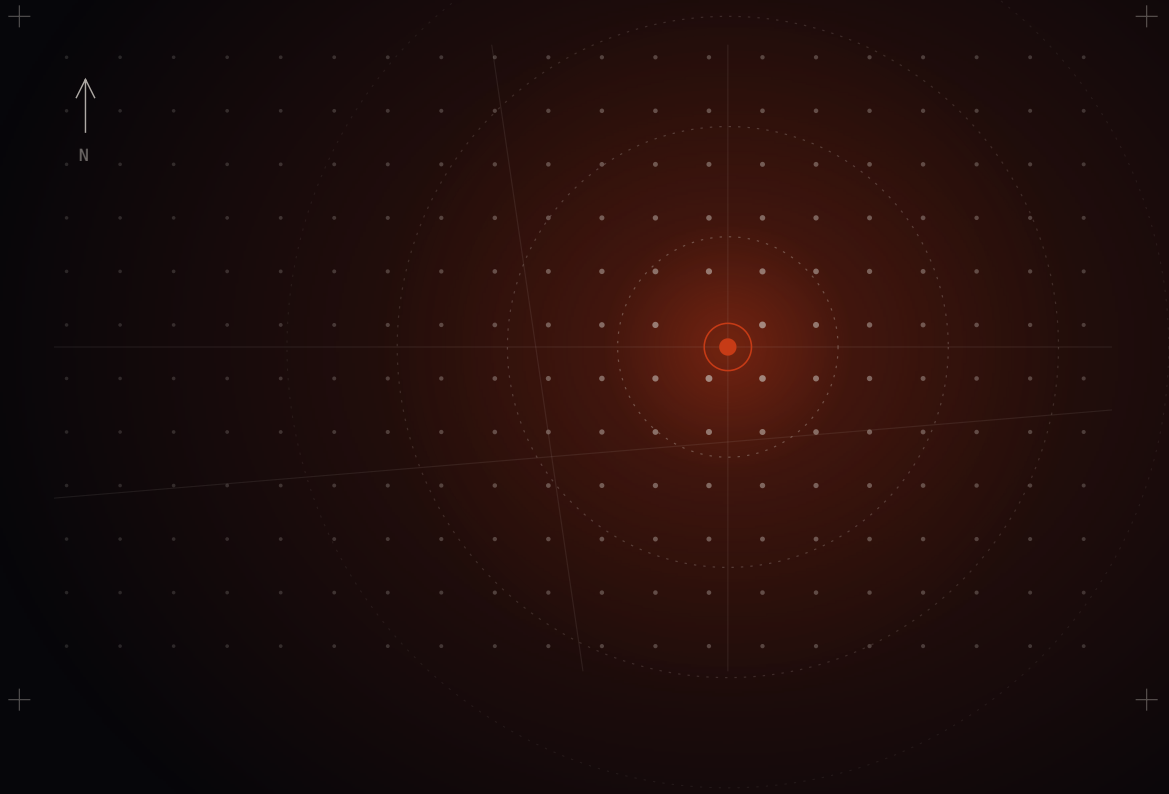
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— NEXT STEP —

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