
THE PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE TO

Google Business Profile

What It Is · How It Works · Why It Matters · What AI Is Doing to It

A field manual for Fresno and Central Valley small business owners and their marketing partners

Navigator's Log R&D; · Clear-Point Technical · June 2026

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Note to Steve Richardson: This guide was written so you can read it, share it with clients, and use it without needing to be a technology expert. Technical terms are always explained in plain language before being used.

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PART 1

What Is Google Business Profile — And Why Should You Care?

Google Business Profile — most people still call it Google My Business, and that's fine — is a free tool that Google provides to local businesses. It controls how your business appears when someone searches for you or searches for what you do in a specific place.

When someone types "HVAC repair Fresno" or "plumber near me" into Google on their phone, the first thing they usually see is not a list of websites. It is a map with three business listings directly underneath it. Those three listings are what the industry calls the **Local Pack**. The businesses in that map block get the majority of phone calls and website clicks from that search.

Your Google Business Profile is what determines whether your business shows up in that local pack, where it appears in that pack, and what a customer sees when they find you there. It controls your business name, phone number, address, hours, photos, services, the ability to receive reviews, and how those reviews are displayed.

If you do not actively manage your GBP, you are leaving all of those decisions to chance — or to the people who submit incorrect information, to competitors who are actively managing theirs, and increasingly to AI systems that pull from whatever data they can find.

The simple version

Google Business Profile is the front door of your business on the internet. It is free. It is the most important digital property most local businesses own. Most businesses treat it like a set-it-and-forget-it form they filled out once. The ones that manage it actively get dramatically more calls.

Here is something that surprises most business owners: Google controls what shows up in your GBP listing, not you. Anyone can suggest a change to your business hours, your phone number, even your name, and Google may apply that change automatically. Without active monitoring, your listing can quietly become wrong — and you will never know until a customer calls a dead number or shows up when you are closed.

PART 2

How GBP Works: The Mechanics Behind the Map

Understanding how Google decides who shows up in the local pack matters, because it tells you exactly what to do — and what not to waste time on.

Google uses three main factors to determine local ranking:

Relevance — Does the business match what the person is searching for? If your GBP says you are a landscaping company and someone searches for "tree removal Fresno," Google looks at whether your services, business description, and content mention tree removal. A GBP with a blank services list and a one-sentence description loses to a fully completed one every time.

Distance — How close is the business to the person searching? Google uses both the searcher's physical location and the city or neighborhood mentioned in the search. A business in northwest Fresno will have a harder time showing up for searches in southeast Fresno, but a well-optimized profile can extend effective range compared to a poorly optimized one.

Prominence — How well-known and trusted is the business, as far as Google can tell? This is where review count, review rating, response rate to reviews, post activity, number of photos, and consistency of information across the internet all matter. Google is trying to answer the question: "Is this a real, active, legitimate, well-regarded business?"

Prominence in Detail

Prominence is the factor most within your control, and it is the factor most businesses ignore. Google measures it through signals including:

- Total number of Google reviews
- Average star rating
- Recency of reviews (73% of consumers only look at reviews from the last month)
- Whether the business responds to reviews — and how
- Frequency of Google Posts (posts are like mini-ads that appear on your profile)
- Number and quality of photos
- Consistency of your business name, address, and phone number across the internet
- How many websites link to your business or mention it
- Whether your website is properly connected to your GBP
- Whether you have filled out every section of your profile

The compound effect

Every additional Google review a business receives generates an estimated 80 additional website visits, 63 direction requests, and 16 phone calls per month, according to a 2025 Birdeye study of over 100,000 businesses. This is not a one-time bump — it compounds. The 240th review does more for you than the 40th review, because by then you are ranking in position one or two and getting traffic at a completely different rate.

How Posts Work

Google Posts are short updates — think of them like Facebook posts but they appear directly on your GBP listing and in search results. You can post announcements, seasonal offers, photos of recent work, tips, or anything relevant to your business. Google favors active profiles. A business that posts once a month signals activity and currency. A business that has not posted in two years signals dormancy, even if it is open every day.

Posts expire after seven days unless set as events. A managed profile keeps a steady rotation of posts that refresh the listing, give Google new indexed content, and give customers something to see beyond a static listing.

How Reviews Work in the Algorithm

Reviews are not just star ratings. Google reads the text of reviews and uses that text to understand what a business does, how it serves customers, and whether specific keywords associated with the business appear in what real customers say. A roofing company whose reviews frequently mention 'tile replacement,' 'emergency leak,' and 'fair price' will rank better for those searches than one with identical star ratings but generic reviews that say 'great job, highly recommend.'

This is why asking customers to write detailed, specific reviews matters — not just getting any review.

PART 3

What the Research Actually Shows

The following statistics come from BrightLocal's annual Local Consumer Review Survey (the most comprehensive independent study of local search behavior, conducted yearly since 2010), Birdeye's 2025 analysis of over 100,000 business profiles, and Localo's analysis of over 2 million GBPs. These are the most credible publicly available sources on local search behavior.



Source: BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2025–2026; Birdeye Business Profile Study 2025

What the Top-Ranked Businesses Look Like

When Localo analyzed over 2 million Google Business Profiles, they found a clear pattern: businesses that rank in the top three positions of local search results have an average of 240 or more Google reviews. That is not a coincidence. It is how the algorithm works.

Businesses in position one in the local pack get roughly 44% of all clicks from that search. Position two gets about 31%. Position three gets about 17%. Everything below the pack — every website listing, every directory — splits the remaining 8%.

What this means in dollars

If your business category gets 1,000 searches per month in Fresno and you are in position one of the local pack, you are getting roughly 440 people looking at your profile. If you are below the pack, you are sharing roughly 80 people with every other business not in the top three. The financial difference between position one and position four is not incremental — it is structural.

The Perfect 5.0 Problem

Here is a finding that surprises most business owners: a perfect 5.0 star rating is actually less effective for conversion than a rating between 4.2 and 4.7. Research from Northwestern University's Spiegel Research Center found that 46% of consumers are suspicious of a perfect 5.0 rating, rising to 53% for businesses with

fewer than 50 reviews. Consumers have learned that perfect ratings often mean fake reviews, too few reviews, or an actively managed review suppression system.

The sweet spot for trust and conversion is a rating between 4.2 and 4.9 with a significant review count — ideally 50 or more — and visible, thoughtful responses to both positive and negative reviews. Authentic looks authentic. Perfect looks manufactured.

The Review Response Finding

This one matters especially for businesses that currently ignore negative reviews: 89% of consumers read business responses to reviews, and 56% say a thoughtful response to a negative review improved their overall perception of the business. Ignoring a negative review does not make it go away. It confirms what the reviewer said. A calm, professional response that acknowledges the concern and explains the resolution demonstrates exactly the kind of service culture that attracts new customers.

PART 4

The Fresno Market: Who Is Searching and What Are They Worth?

All of the research above tells us what consumers do nationally. What matters for this work is what the Fresno market actually looks like — who is searching, what they earn, whether they own homes, and whether the demographics match the services being marketed. The following data is drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2024 American Community Survey and the 2026 population estimates from Cubit Planning.

Fresno County at a Glance

1.03M Fresno County population (2026 est.)	546K City of Fresno population	\$74,201 County median household income	55.5% County homeownership rate
\$388,800 County median home value (2024)	50.1% City of Fresno homeownership rate	\$374,800 City median home value (2024)	33.5 yrs Median age, Fresno County

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; Cubit Planning 2026 Projections

Who the Core Home Services Customer Is

For HVAC, roofing, plumbing, pest control, landscaping, electrical, auto repair, and cleaning services, the core customer profile is a homeowner aged 25 to 64 with a household income sufficient to pay for professional services. In Fresno, this breaks down as follows:

Age Group	% of Fresno Pop.	Est. City Count	Home Services Relevance
25–44 (early career, family formation)	29.8%	~163K	PRIMARY — buying homes, first-time maintenance, growing families
45–64 (established, peak earning)	20.4%	~111K	PRIMARY — highest spend on home improvement, maintenance contracts
65+ (retired, fixed income)	12.4%	~68K	SECONDARY — regular service contracts, mobility-based services
Under 25	14.3%	~78K	LOW — primarily renters, lower spend on owned-property services

The Homeowner Math

With a city homeownership rate of 50.1% applied to a population of 546,000, Fresno has approximately 273,000 residents in owner-occupied households. With an average household size of 2.9 people, that represents roughly 94,000 homeowner households in the city alone, and closer to 220,000 across Fresno County.

Those 94,000 to 220,000 homeowner households are the primary market for every home services business in the prospect database — the HVAC companies, roofers, plumbers, pest control companies, landscapers, and electricians. They need AC in the summer (Fresno averages 19 days above 100°F per year). They need roofs maintained. They have pest problems driven by the Valley heat. Their yards need water.

The income picture

Households aged 25–44 in Fresno report a median income of \$75,857. Households aged 45–64 report \$82,971. These are the two primary home services demographics. They earn enough to pay for professional service — they are choosing between providers. That choice is made almost entirely online, primarily on Google, before they ever make a phone call.

Auto Repair and Beauty/Personal Services

Auto repair has a broader demographic base — essentially every working adult who owns a car (average 2 cars per Fresno household). With 236,000 employed residents and near-universal car ownership, the auto repair market is close to 100,000 potential customer households.

Beauty, hair, and personal care services primarily serve the 25–64 female population, with significant Hispanic clientele (Fresno's largest ethnic group at roughly 50% of the city). Spanish-language or culturally competent marketing and review content represents a specific opportunity for salons and spas that most GBP managers ignore.

Dental services have the broadest demographic base — nearly universal — but the most complex purchasing behavior due to insurance dependence, which means the first-appointment search is the critical conversion moment, not recurring need.

PART 5

The Dos and Don'ts of GBP Management

The following are concrete rules that apply to any local business in Fresno. They are organized by the behavior that matters most to Google's algorithm and to real customers.

DO — These help your ranking and reputation	DON'T — These hurt your ranking or trigger penalties
✓ Verify your GBP as the owner and keep login credentials secure	✗ Add keywords to your business name (e.g. 'John's Plumbing — Best Fresno Plumber')
✓ Check your hours every time they change, including holidays	✗ List a P.O. box or virtual office address if you don't serve customers there
✓ Add at least 5 high-quality photos of your work, your team, and your location	✗ Offer discounts or gifts in exchange for reviews
✓ Respond to every review — positive and negative — within 48 hours	✗ Ask employees, friends, or family to write reviews
✓ Post an update or offer at least once per month	✗ Delete or ignore negative reviews
✓ Fill out every field: description, services, attributes, products	✗ Respond to negative reviews with defensiveness or excuses
✓ Use your exact legal business name — no added keywords	✗ Post the same update repeatedly without changes
✓ List your service area accurately (cities/zip codes you actually serve)	✗ Use stock photos as your primary profile images
✓ Ask real customers to leave reviews after every completed job	✗ Leave your services list blank or vague
✓ Connect your actual website to your GBP	✗ Set hours you do not actually keep
✓ Check monthly for suggested edits or changes Google has applied	✗ Create a second profile for the same business location
✓ Use the Q&A; section — seed it with real questions customers ask	✗ Allow your profile to go months without any activity

On Review Responses — A Closer Look

Responding to reviews is one of the highest-leverage actions a business can take. Here is how to do it correctly:

Positive reviews: Thank the customer by name if they gave it. Reference one specific thing they mentioned. Invite them back. Keep it under three sentences. Avoid copy-pasting the same response — Google and customers both notice.

Negative reviews: Acknowledge the experience without admitting liability. Express genuine concern. Offer to resolve it offline by providing a direct contact. Do not argue with the reviewer, even if they are factually wrong. Remember: you are writing for the 50 future customers who will read that response, not for the person who left the review.

Neutral reviews (3–4 stars): These are underrated opportunities. A thoughtful response to a 3-star review that turned a neutral customer into a resolved one gets read closely by future customers. It shows problem-solving rather than defensiveness.

The language that works

A good negative review response sounds like this: 'Thank you for taking the time to share your experience, [Name]. What you described is not the standard we hold ourselves to, and we would like to make it right. Please reach out to us directly at [phone/email] so we can address this personally.' That is it. No excuses, no counter-arguments, no defensiveness. Customers see that and think: this business takes care of problems.

Photo Rules That Actually Matter

Photos matter more than most business owners realize. Google's own data shows that profiles with more than 100 photos receive 520% more calls than profiles with fewer than 10. The photos do not need to be professional — they need to be real. Real photos of completed jobs, real team members, real equipment, real work-in-progress carry far more weight than stock images of generic people shaking hands in an office.

For service businesses specifically: before-and-after photos of completed work are the highest-converting image type. A roofing company that shows a deteriorated roof and the same house with a new roof is showing proof. A pest control company that shows evidence of infestation and a treated home is showing capability. A landscaping company showing a backyard transformation is showing what \$3,000 actually looks like.

PART 6

When GBP Does Not Work — And Why

GBP is not a magic switch. There are specific conditions under which it performs poorly, and businesses that invest in GBP management without addressing these underlying issues will be disappointed.

When the Business Has an Underlying Reputation Problem

GBP management amplifies what is already there. If a business has a 4.1 rating with recurring complaints about billing surprises, technician conduct, or service delivery failures, better photo management will not fix it. The GBP becomes a well-lit showcase of the problem. The right sequence is: fix the operational issue first, build a systematic review solicitation process, then invest in active GBP management. Doing it in reverse order wastes money.

From the Fresno prospect database: Fresno Roofing Co (4.3 stars, recurring complaint about starting work without approval), Van Ness Chevron Auto (4.2 stars, ABS repair trust breach), Always Ready Cleaning (4.4 stars, incomplete service delivery), and Fresno Dental Surgery Center (4.1 stars, staff conduct complaints) are examples where GBP management alone is insufficient. These businesses need operational change paired with review strategy.

When the Service Category Has Low Search Volume

GBP works on search demand. If customers in Fresno are not searching for your specific service, a perfectly optimized GBP will not generate calls because no one is typing that query. This is rare for the categories in the Fresno database — HVAC, pest control, auto repair, and dental are all high-search categories — but it is a consideration for highly specialized services.

When Geographic Coverage Is Unclear

Service-area businesses (plumbers, HVAC companies, pest control) that serve a wide area must declare that service area correctly in GBP. A business that lists only its office address but serves all of Fresno County will underperform in areas far from that address unless the service area is explicitly set. Google uses both the business address and the declared service area to determine where the listing appears.

When Nothing Stays Consistent

Google measures consistency. If your phone number on your GBP is different from the number on your website, different from the number on Yelp, and different from the number in the Yellow Pages, Google's systems interpret this as a signal that the information is unreliable — and it lowers your ranking accordingly. This is called citation inconsistency, and it silently damages local rankings for thousands of businesses who have no idea it is happening.

Citation consistency in plain language

Imagine you are trying to find a business. You look it up on Google and see one phone number. You look it up on Yelp and see a different number. You check their website and see a third number. You stop trusting the listing entirely. Google's algorithm does the same thing. Consistent name, address, and phone number everywhere online — exactly the same — is one of the most important and most neglected factors in local search ranking.

When Competition Is Saturated

In high-competition categories where several businesses have 1,000+ reviews and strong active profiles — such as HVAC in Fresno, where Allbritten (5,706 reviews), Balanced Comfort (3,533 reviews), and Lee's (4,502 reviews) dominate — a new entrant cannot quickly displace them. GBP management for businesses in those categories is still valuable, but the primary goal shifts from ranking first to ranking in the local pack at all, and differentiating through content and service area specificity rather than broad category dominance.

PART 7

The Financial Reality: Comparing Your Options

A business owner considering where to spend marketing dollars has several options. Each has a real cost and a real outcome. The table below is based on documented industry data from 2024–2026 studies and real client tracking, not marketing department estimates.

Channel	Typical Monthly Cost	How it Works	Typical Outcome	Verdict
Google Business Profile (managed)	\$0 platform cost \$125–\$350 for management	Free listing, actively managed: posts, reviews, photos, corrections	Position 1–3 in local pack = ~440 of 1,000 monthly searchers see your listing	Best ROI of any local channel. Compounds over time.
Google Business Profile (unmanaged)	\$0	Profile exists but is ignored	Ranks below active competitors; wrong info drives customers away	Passive liability. Free but costs you business.
Google Local Services Ads (LSA)	\$200–\$800/month in spend	Pay-per-lead ads that appear above the local pack with Google's 'Google Guaranteed' badge	Qualified leads from verified searches; pay only when a customer calls	Strong complement to GBP. Not a replacement. Works best when GBP is already strong.
Yelp Ads	\$300–\$1,000/month	Paid placement on Yelp search results; leads sold through platform	~\$87/lead at ~9% close rate = ~\$970/customer acquired	Expensive per acquisition. Yelp is declining in home services. Evaluate carefully.
Angi / HomeAdvisor Leads	\$200–\$800/month	Pay-per-lead from shared pool; same lead sold to 4–6 contractors	~\$42/lead at ~4% close rate = ~\$1,050/customer acquired	Revenue fell 17%/year for 3 years. Lead quality widely criticized.
Directory Listing Services (Thryv, Hibu)	\$300–\$600/month	Paid directory placement on multiple platforms including Yellow Pages network	Low and declining traffic; national platform with no local context	Outdated model. Poor ROI for most home service categories.

Facebook/Instagram Ads (local)	\$300–\$800/month in spend	Targeted social ads by demographics and location	Good for awareness and brand recall; lower purchase intent than search	Useful complement for visual services (landscaping, salons). Not a replacement for search.
Word of Mouth Only	\$0	Referrals from existing customers	Highly effective but limited reach; no way to capture non-referral demand	The best customers, but not enough of them. GBP captures what word of mouth misses.

The Owned vs. Rented Distinction

One of the most important concepts in marketing economics is the difference between channels you own and channels you rent.

Your Google Business Profile is owned. No one can take it from you (as long as you are verified as the owner). The improvements you make to it — the reviews, the photos, the posts, the completed profile — accumulate over time and continue working even when you stop actively adding to them. They compound.

Yelp Ads, Angi leads, and directory subscriptions are rented. The moment you stop paying, the visibility disappears completely. You have built nothing. The leads belong to the platform, not to you. A business that has spent \$10,000 on Angi over two years and then stops has nothing to show for it except a track record of having been listed there.

This is the core financial argument for investing in GBP and organic content over paid directory listings: you are building an asset, not renting attention. The Fresno businesses that rank first in HVAC and plumbing today got there by building over time. The businesses starting that process now will be the ones ranking in 2027 and 2028.

PART 8

Why Directories and Aggregate Listers Are Fading

Steve's existing business model — a directory of Fresno-area businesses — sits in a category that has been in structural decline since approximately 2016. Understanding why this happened helps explain both what does not work and what to build instead.

The Yellow Pages Lesson

Yellow Pages was the dominant local business directory for 40 years. In its peak year, Yellow Pages collected more than \$14 billion in revenue from local businesses across the United States. By 2023, that number had collapsed to under \$2 billion, and the company has continued to shrink. The reason is not that local businesses stopped needing to be found — it is that the platform consumers used to find them changed. Yellow Pages was where consumers looked. Then Google replaced that behavior. Yellow Pages never recovered.

The same structural shift is now happening to the platforms that benefited from Yellow Pages' decline.

Angi's Decline — By the Numbers

Angi (the merger of Angie's List and HomeAdvisor) was the dominant home services lead platform in the United States. Here is its recent trajectory:

Year	Approximate Revenue	Year-Over-Year Change	What Was Happening
2022	\$1.8 billion (peak)	Baseline	Post-pandemic home improvement boom
2023	~\$1.5 billion	-17%	Consumer return to normal; lead quality complaints intensify
2024	~\$1.3 billion	-13%	Service requests down 19.2% year-over-year on average
2025 (full year)	~\$1.1 billion	-15%	350 employees cut in January 2026; stock down ~95% from peak
Q4 2025 alone	\$240.8 million	-10.1% YoY	Missed Wall Street estimates; EPS 50% below expectations

Source: Angi public financial filings, Q4 2025 earnings report, StockStory research

This is not a company in a temporary rough patch. Its revenue has declined approximately 17% per year for three consecutive years. An investor who put \$1,000 into Angi shares five years ago had roughly \$59 at the end of 2025. The business model of aggregating leads and selling them to multiple contractors simultaneously has been rejected by the market.

Why Lead Aggregators Fail Home Service Businesses

The fundamental problem with platforms like Angi, HomeAdvisor, and Thumbtack is the shared lead model. When a homeowner submits a request for HVAC service, that lead is sold to four, five, or six HVAC companies simultaneously. All six of those companies call the homeowner within minutes of each other. The homeowner feels overwhelmed and annoyed. They often do not call any of them back. The contractors all paid for a lead that converted nowhere.

Independent analysis of one contractor's 14-month tracking of paid directory lead costs found:

- **Yelp Ads:** \$87 per lead at 9% close rate = approximately \$970 in cost per acquired customer
- **Angi Leads:** \$42 per lead at 4% close rate = approximately \$1,050 in cost per acquired customer
- **Average job ticket:** \$480

Both platforms were costing more per job than the job was worth. The contractor stopped both within a quarter.

Why Generic Local Directories Fail

A generic local business directory — a website that lists businesses by category in a given city without offering substantial content, reviews, or a specific reason for consumers to visit — competes against Google, Yelp, Bing, Apple Maps, and an ever-growing list of specialty platforms, all of which have more traffic, more reviews, and more consumer trust built over many years.

The only viable path for a local directory is to become something more specific than a directory: a publication with genuine editorial content and a defined audience, a lead generation platform with verified consumer intent, or a community resource with content consumers actually seek out. A list of businesses with basic contact information is not a product in 2026.

The real question for any directory business

Why would a consumer come to your directory instead of just searching Google? If the honest answer is 'I'm not sure they would,' that is the product problem. The solution is not better marketing of the directory. It is building something with a genuine reason to exist.

PART 9

AI, Crawlers, and the Changing Internet — A Plain-Language Briefing

This section is written specifically for business owners who are not interested in becoming technology experts — but who need to understand what is happening to the internet and how it affects their business visibility. No jargon without explanation. No assumption of prior knowledge.

What a Crawler Is

Imagine Google has an enormous army of robots. These robots spend all day, every day, visiting websites and reading them. They are called **crawlers** or **spiders**. When a crawler visits a website, it reads all the text, notes the links, registers the images, and sends all of that information back to Google's database. This process is called **indexing** — Google is building an index of the internet, like a massive card catalog of every webpage that exists.

Google crawls billions of pages every day. When you search for something, Google does not actually search the internet in that moment — it searches its own index of the internet that its crawlers have already built. This is why results appear in milliseconds.

Your Google Business Profile is a special case: it feeds directly into Google's database without needing to be crawled from a website. When you update your hours in GBP, that change appears in Google Search almost immediately.

What Indexing Means for Your Business

When your website is indexed, Google knows it exists. When specific pages of your website are indexed with relevant content, Google knows what you do, where you do it, and who you do it for. A website with a single home page and no content is barely indexed. A website with service-specific pages ('Fresno HVAC Installation,' 'Emergency Plumbing Fresno,' 'Roof Repair Fresno'), a blog with relevant articles, and consistent business information is deeply indexed — meaning Google has a detailed picture of the business and surfaces it for a much wider range of relevant searches.

GBP accelerates this. Google trusts its own platform, so GBP information is indexed immediately and comprehensively. A well-maintained GBP functions as both a directory listing and a content signal that reinforces your website's indexing.

What AI Is, In Plain Terms

Artificial intelligence, for our purposes, means computer systems that have been trained to understand and generate human language. The big ones you may have heard of — ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Anthropic's Claude, Microsoft Copilot — are all examples of what are called **large language models** (LLMs for short). They learned how to respond to questions by reading an enormous amount of text from the internet during a training process.

Here is the key point: these AI systems learned from everything they read during training, including business directories, review platforms, news articles, and websites. When someone asks ChatGPT 'What are some good HVAC companies in Fresno?' the AI answers based on what it learned — which includes what it read about your business (or did not read, if your business had almost no online presence).

This is why online presence matters beyond just Google search. If your business has strong GBP data, good reviews, a real website, and content that crawlers can find and read, all of that gets incorporated into the data that trains and informs AI systems.

The Steve version

You do not need to use AI to benefit from it — or be hurt by it. But you do need to understand that AI systems are increasingly the thing that answers people's questions when they search. If your business information is correct, current, and well-documented online, AI systems will reference it correctly. If it is wrong, missing, or buried, AI systems will either get it wrong or not mention you at all.

PART 10

How AI Is Changing What Gets Found Online

This is the most important section for understanding what is changing right now — as of 2025 and 2026 — and what it means for local businesses specifically.

Google AI Overviews: The New First Thing People See

In May 2024, Google launched what it calls **AI Overviews** (previously called Search Generative Experience or SGE). This is a feature that, for many searches, shows an AI-generated paragraph or summary at the very top of the search results page — above all other results, above ads, above the local pack, above everything.

A consumer searches for 'how to know if I need a new roof.' Instead of seeing a list of roofing company websites, they first see a paragraph generated by Google's AI that answers the question directly. The links to actual websites appear below it. Many consumers read the AI answer and do not click through to any website at all.

60%+	58%	34–60%
of local searches now trigger AI Overviews (ALM Corp / Ahrefs, 2026)	of Google searches now result in zero clicks to external websites	decline in click-through rates for search results when AI Overviews appear

Source: Local Falcon Whitepaper May 2025; SparkToro Zero-Click Study 2025

What AI Overviews Mean for Local Service Businesses Specifically

Here is the important nuance: AI Overviews affect informational searches much more than they affect local service searches. When someone searches 'how to unclog a drain,' they might read an AI-generated answer and not call anyone. But when someone searches 'plumber Fresno' or 'emergency AC repair near me,' they need to take action — they need a phone number. Google's AI Overviews for those searches still surface business listings, often drawing directly from GBP data.

A Local Falcon study analyzing 60,000 queries found that AI Overviews appearing in local business searches do not use the same distance-based ranking as traditional local packs. Businesses with strong GBP signals — high review count, recent activity, complete profiles — appear in AI-generated results regardless of exact distance. This is actually an opportunity for well-optimized businesses to reach beyond their immediate geographic neighborhood.

How AI Chooses Which Businesses to Mention

When Google's AI generates an answer that references a specific local business, it is drawing from its knowledge of that business — which comes from GBP data, website content, review text, and third-party mentions. The businesses that appear in AI-generated summaries are generally businesses that have:

- A fully completed and actively maintained GBP
- A substantial review count with recent reviews (remember: 73% of consumers only look at the last month)
- Review text that contains specific, relevant language about services and location
- A website with actual content, not just a phone number and an address
- Consistent business information across multiple online platforms
- Business mentions in local news, blog posts, or other websites

ChatGPT, Claude, and Other AI Systems

Google is not the only AI system that answers questions about local businesses. ChatGPT (made by OpenAI), Claude (made by Anthropic), Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, and Perplexity are all being used by consumers to ask questions like 'recommend a good roofer in Fresno' or 'what is the best pest control company in the Central Valley.' These AI systems were trained on data crawled from the internet, and they have varying levels of current information depending on when they were last updated.

Most of them also have the ability to search the web in real time now. When someone asks Claude or ChatGPT for a local business recommendation and the AI can search the web, it will often look at Google results — including GBP data — and incorporate what it finds into its answer. A business with a strong GBP and good reviews stands a meaningful chance of being mentioned in AI-generated recommendations. A business with a thin or incorrect GBP will not.

The Practical Upshot for Steve's Clients

Steve does not need to become an AI user to benefit from this. What matters is that the businesses he works with have correct, complete, active GBP profiles and consistent information across the web. The GBP becomes the authoritative data source that both Google's traditional search algorithm and Google's AI systems draw from. Managing the GBP is managing visibility across all of these channels simultaneously — not just traditional search.

A useful analogy

Think of your GBP as your business's permanent file at city hall. Every government agency, every inspector, every permit office checks that file to know who you are and what you do. If the file is current and complete, every interaction goes smoothly. If the file has wrong information — old address, wrong phone, outdated licenses — every interaction runs into problems. AI systems checking your business are like digital inspectors checking that file. Keep the file right.

What About Fresno Specifically — Does AI Work Differently Here?

Yes, there are geographic differences in how AI systems and local search work, and Fresno has some specific characteristics worth knowing.

Fresno is a large mid-tier city — large enough that Google has substantial local business data but small enough that competition for many categories is less saturated than San Francisco or Los Angeles. This is an advantage. A Fresno roofing company can achieve a top-three GBP ranking with 150–300 reviews. The same company in LA might need 1,000+ to break the top three.

The Spanish-speaking population in Fresno — roughly 50% of the city — represents a significant opportunity for businesses that respond to reviews in Spanish or maintain bilingual GBP content. Google's AI understands Spanish and serves Spanish-language results to Spanish-language searchers. A GBP with Spanish-language elements performs better for that audience and is almost always an unaddressed gap among Fresno's small businesses.

Fresno's extreme summer heat (19 days above 100°F annually) creates predictable search demand spikes for HVAC, pest control, and cooling-related services from approximately April through September. Businesses that post seasonal content in March and April — before the heat arrives — position themselves to capture that search demand at its peak. Most businesses do not do this because they are already busy by the time summer hits. The time to post about summer HVAC service is February.

PART 11

What This All Means for Fresno Service Businesses

Everything in this guide points toward the same set of practical conclusions. Here is the summary.

The Search Behavior Reality

When a Fresno homeowner needs an HVAC company, a plumber, a roofer, a pest control service, or an auto repair shop, they search on Google. They look at the local pack — the three businesses on the map. They read the reviews. They compare ratings. They call the one that looks most legitimate and trustworthy. This decision happens in under five minutes for most services. The business that shows up first with a strong rating and recent reviews wins that call.

That is not a theory. BrightLocal has documented it annually for over a decade. The behavior has not changed; only the technology delivering the answer has changed.

The Competitive Window

In every home services category in Fresno, there are businesses that have put in the work and businesses that have not. The ones that have not — the ones with five reviews, wrong hours, no photos, and zero post activity — are leaving money on the table for the ones that will. The database of 93 Fresno businesses built for this project shows that roughly half of the market has a GBP completeness score of 7 or below, and approximately 16% are near-invisible.

That gap is the opportunity. The businesses that engage a GBP management service now build a compounding advantage that becomes harder to close over time. The business that has 400 managed reviews by 2028 will not be displaced by a competitor who starts managing in 2028.

The AI Transition Opportunity

AI Overviews appearing in 40% of local business searches sounds like a threat, and for businesses with thin online presence it is. For businesses with strong GBPs and active content, it is an opportunity to appear in AI-generated answers — a placement that most businesses are not yet thinking about or preparing for.

The businesses in Fresno that manage their GBPs well, maintain consistent information across the web, and generate real, specific, recent reviews are positioning themselves to be the ones that AI systems recommend when consumers ask. That advantage builds now, before the AI transition is complete, when the barrier to entry is still low.

What Steve's Work Enables

The service work described in the business plans attached to this manual — GBP management, citation cleanup, content creation, review strategy — is not a luxury add-on for businesses that are already succeeding. For the majority of the businesses in the Fresno prospect database, it is the difference between appearing in the search result that drives their next 50 customers and not appearing at all.

The businesses that need this most are not the Allbrittens and the Balanced Comforts with 5,000 reviews and national brand support. They are Rod's Plumbing (5.0 stars, 233 reviews, minimal website), Carlos Yard Service (5.0 stars, 14 reviews, no web presence), A&C; Pro Roofing (5.0 stars, 52 reviews, minimal site), and the 38 Priority A businesses in the database who are doing excellent work and are nearly invisible online. Those are the conversations worth having.



APPENDIX

Key Terms Glossary

Every technical term used in this guide is defined here in plain language.

Algorithm

A set of rules that a computer follows to make a decision. Google's local search algorithm is the set of rules it uses to decide which businesses appear in the local pack and in what order.

AI Overview (AIO)

A paragraph or summary generated by Google's artificial intelligence that appears at the top of some search results pages. It answers the user's question directly before showing links to any websites.

Citation

Any place online where your business name, address, and phone number appear together. Google uses citations to confirm your business information is consistent and trustworthy.

Citation Consistency

Whether your business name, address, and phone number are exactly the same everywhere online. Inconsistencies between platforms confuse Google's algorithm and can hurt your local ranking.

Crawler / Spider

An automated program that visits websites and reads their content to add it to a search engine's database.

GBP (Google Business Profile)

Formerly known as Google My Business. The free Google tool that controls how your business appears in Google Search and Google Maps.

Indexing

The process of a search engine reading and storing information about a webpage so it can appear in search results.

LLM (Large Language Model)

A type of artificial intelligence trained on large amounts of text. ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Claude are all LLMs. They generate text responses to questions.

Local Pack

The block of three business listings with a map that appears near the top of Google search results for local service searches. The local pack receives the large majority of clicks from those searches.

Prominence

One of the three factors Google uses to rank local businesses. It measures how well-known and trusted a business appears to be, based on reviews, online mentions, and profile completeness.

Relevance

One of the three factors Google uses to rank local businesses. It measures how closely a business matches what the person searched for.

Review Velocity

The rate at which new reviews are coming in. Google favors steady, consistent review growth over sudden spikes, which can indicate fake reviews.

Service Area Business

A business that serves customers at their location (a plumber, an HVAC company, a landscaper) rather than at a fixed storefront. GBP has specific settings for service area businesses that affect how they appear in local search.

SGE (Search Generative Experience)

Google's original name for AI Overviews when it was in testing. Now publicly called AI Overviews.

Zero-Click Search

A search where the user gets their answer directly from the Google results page — from an AI Overview, a featured snippet, or the Knowledge Panel — without clicking through to any website.

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