

Your Google Business Profile. Done Right.

A step-by-step guide to setting up and optimizing your GBP — from the day you verify to the day you rank.

Your Google Business Profile is the **single most powerful free tool** you have for local visibility. Get it wrong and you're invisible. Get it right and you show up when customers in your city search for exactly what you offer — on Google Search, Google Maps, and now inside Google's AI answers. This guide walks you through every step, in plain English.

1 BEFORE ANYTHING Take a Baseline Snapshot

Before you touch a single setting, take a screenshot of where you currently rank on Google Maps for your main service. Once you start making changes, you lose the ability to measure what actually moved the needle.

PRO TIP

Search for your primary service + your city (e.g. "plumber Toronto") and screenshot your position in the map results. Date it. Save it. This is your benchmark.

2 STEP ONE Verification

Google needs to confirm your business is real. In 2026, the most common method is **video verification** — you'll be asked to record your storefront, signage, address number, and sometimes your equipment or interior.

- ☐ Have your physical address visible and ready to show on camera
- ☐ Show your business signage clearly in the video
- ☐ If home-based or no signage, show your address on an official document
- ☐ Don't rush through the verification flow — read each screen carefully

WATCH OUT

Scam alert: Google will **never** call you to help verify your listing. If someone calls claiming to be Google and asks for account access or a verification code — hang up. This is a known GBP hijacking scam.

3 YOUR IDENTITY Business Name

Use your **real, legal business name** — exactly as it appears on your signage, invoices, and website. Don't add extra keywords to it.

Keywords in the business name is one of the top-3 local ranking factors — but Google's rules say your name must reflect your actual brand. Stuffing it (e.g. "Toronto's Best Plumber & Drain Service") risks suspension.

IMPORTANT NUANCE

Your business name and primary category work together to determine which searches you're eligible to appear in. If your name is too niche (e.g. "Kids Only Dentist Downtown"), Google may not show you for broader searches like "dentist near me." Keep the name real and broad enough.

4 HIGHEST LEVERAGE SECTION Categories

This is where most businesses leave money on the table. Categories tell Google what searches you're eligible to show up for.

Primary category: Pick the one category that best describes your main service. If you're a personal injury lawyer, pick "Personal Injury Attorney" — not just "Lawyer."

Secondary categories: Add every category that genuinely applies. A gym should add "Yoga Studio," "Personal Trainer," "Boot Camp," "Weight Loss Service" — each one opens a new set of searches.

- ☐ **Primary category set** — your most important, specific service type
- ☐ **Secondary categories added** — everything that genuinely applies
- ☐ **Cross-checked against competitors** — look at the top 3 ranked businesses and see what categories they use that you don't

DON'T DO THIS

One GBP cannot rank well for completely different service types. If you're a plumber who also does electrical work, you'll likely need separate listings to rank for both. Don't stuff one profile with unrelated categories.

5 CRITICAL ACCURACY Address & Location

Your GBP must target the city your business is **actually located in** — not the city you want to rank in. A Mississauga address optimized for Toronto can cost you 5–7 positions in the local pack.

- ☐ Address is your real, physical address — no P.O. boxes for storefront businesses
- ☐ Your preferred city matches your actual address city
- ☐ Phone number is a local number matching your city's area code
- ☐ NAP (Name, Address, Phone) is identical across your website and all directories

Service-area businesses (no physical storefront): hide your address and set a service area covering the cities you actually serve. Don't overexpand — Google limits visibility based on where you realistically operate.

6 TELL YOUR STORY Business Description

You get 750 characters. Use all of them. Your description doesn't directly affect local pack rankings, but it now feeds Google's AI answers on Maps — so a detailed, informative description can surface you in AI-powered results for specific queries.

- ☐ First sentence: your most important service + your city
- ☐ List every service you offer
- ☐ Include what makes you different — years in business, certifications, specializations
- ☐ Write naturally — no keyword stuffing, no gimmicks
- ☐ No URLs or promotional claims like "best in Toronto" — Google will reject these

7 OFTEN SKIPPED Services Section

This section is massively underused. Every service you add creates another surface where Google can match your business to a search query. List every single service with a name and description.

- ☐ Every service you offer is listed — don't just add the broad ones
- ☐ Each service has a description (2–3 sentences minimum)
- ☐ Prices added where applicable — 77% of consumers expect to see pricing online
- ☐ Updated whenever you add or stop offering a service

8 SMALL BUT MATTERS Attributes

Attributes are the checkboxes inside your GBP — parking, accessibility, payment methods, languages, appointment availability. Google's Insights panel now flags missing attributes and compares you to competitors. Fill in everything that applies.

- ☐ Accessibility options (wheelchair accessible, etc.)
- ☐ Payment methods accepted
- ☐ Languages spoken
- ☐ Appointment / booking availability
- ☐ Parking options
- ☐ Any industry-specific attributes (e.g. free wi-fi for cafes, delivery for restaurants)

9 SHOW, DON'T TELL Photos

Photos signal that your business is active and real. Google's AI also reads photo content to understand your business better.

The one trick almost nobody uses: Before uploading a photo, add a short text caption directly onto the image — your service keywords, location, what's shown. Upload that version. Google's AI has more context to work with.

- ☐ **Cover photo:** branded, professional, clearly shows what you do
- ☐ **Logo:** uploaded and clear
- ☐ **Team photos:** real people, not stock images
- ☐ **Work photos:** before/after, action shots, completed projects
- ☐ **Location photos:** exterior, interior, signage
- ☐ Minimum 10 photos to start — add more regularly
- ☐ Add keyword-descriptive text captions on photos before uploading

ONCE SET UP — KEEP IT ACTIVE

10 KEEP IT FRESH Google Posts

Google Posts are updates that appear directly on your GBP. A study found that adding Posts led to a 31% increase in Map Views. And 50% of customers are looking for promos or discounts when they search — Google Posts is where you put those offers.

NEW IN 2026

You can now set Google Posts to repeat — daily, weekly, or monthly. Set up recurring offer or event posts so your profile always looks active without manual effort every week.

- ☐ Post at least once per week
- ☐ Use Offer posts for promotions or seasonal deals
- ☐ Use Event posts for classes, workshops, or appointments
- ☐ Set recurring posts for promotions that repeat
- ☐ Include a clear call to action in every post

11 THE FLYWHEEL Reviews

65%

of consumers more likely to choose a business that responds to reviews

77%

of consumers expect to book services online

50%

of customers look for promos or discounts when searching

Reviews are one of the strongest local ranking signals. You can't buy them, but you can build a system to generate them consistently.

- ☐ Get your Google review link from your GBP dashboard — share it with every customer after a job
- ☐ Create a QR code from your review link (free in Canva) — put it on invoices, receipts, business cards
- ☐ Ask right after the positive moment — not days later
- ☐ Respond to every single review — positive and negative
- ☐ Do not ask for reviews mentioning specific staff members — Google updated this policy in 2026

NEVER DO THIS

Do not offer discounts, gifts, or incentives in exchange for reviews. Google will remove them and can suspend your profile. The only rule: ask every satisfied customer to leave an honest review.

12 GBP + WEBSITE ALIGNMENT Your Website Must Match

Google crawls your website after every major GBP edit. If your GBP lists 10 services but your website only mentions 3, that's a red flag. If you change your primary category but your website has no content for that category, it can trigger reverification.

- ☐ Every service on your GBP has a matching page or section on your website
- ☐ Your NAP (name, address, phone) on your website matches your GBP exactly
- ☐ Your website mentions the cities you serve

13 GET LISTED EVERYWHERE Directories & Citations

Citations are mentions of your business (name, address, phone) on other websites. Unstructured citations — mentions in blogs, news, podcasts — are now the #4 most important AI visibility factor.

Search your service category in ChatGPT or Google AI Mode and see which sites they cite. Those are the directories you need to be on.

- ☐ Google Business Profile (this guide)
- ☐ Yelp — appears in almost every AI-cited local result
- ☐ Better Business Bureau (BBB)
- ☐ Yellow Pages / Canada411
- ☐ Industry-specific directories (Houzz for home services, Healthgrades for healthcare, Justia for legal)
- ☐ NAP is identical across every listing — any variation hurts you

14 IT'S NOT SET-AND-FORGET Ongoing Management

The businesses that dominate local search treat their GBP like a living asset. Here's what an active management schedule looks like:

TASK	FREQUENCY
Post a Google Update or Offer	Weekly
Respond to new reviews	Within 24–48 hrs
Upload new photos	Monthly
Review and update Services section	Monthly
Check for unauthorized profile changes	Monthly
Track ranking position changes	Monthly
Review category relevance + add new ones	Quarterly
Check that NAP matches across all directories	Quarterly

REAL RESULT

A dental practice with active GBP management (Whitespark case study) saw: **101% increase in phone calls, 51% increase in review count, 39% more website clicks, 35% more driving direction requests** — all in one year.