KLASS CONCEPTS

FREE SEO CHECKLIST & GUIDE · OCTOBER 2026 EDITION

Getting Found on Google, ChatGPT, and Claude

A Small Business SEO Guide for 2026

How a small business shows up in Google, in Google's AI answers, and in ChatGPT and Claude: what works, what's a waste of money, and a checklist you can work through yourself.

From the people doing SEO work every day: 198 discussions in r/SEO, including comments from Google's John Mueller, checked against Google's own published guidance.

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The short version

- For a local business, your Google Business Profile and your reviews bring in most of the calls from search. Fix those first.
- The AI answers at the top of Google and in ChatGPT and Claude get their information by running ordinary searches. They mostly quote pages that already rank, and businesses other sites mention. The same work covers Google and the AI tools.
- Publishing a lot of pages fast is what Google punished hardest this year. Five good pages beat 500 thin ones.
- Nobody can sell you a reliable "AI visibility" score. If someone quotes you one, they're guessing.

How customers find you now

When someone searches "water heater repair Concord," they see three things:

1. **The map results.** These come from your Google Business Profile.
2. **The regular results** below the map, which come from websites.
3. **An AI summary at the top** (Google calls it an AI Overview). More people also ask ChatGPT, Claude, or Google's AI Mode directly.

The AI part gets all the attention, but it works by running searches behind the scenes and summarizing the pages it finds. ChatGPT gets many of its results from Bing. Claude uses Brave. Google's AI uses Google. So showing up in those answers comes from the same work as showing up in search. Google said as much in its May 2026 guidance: "optimizing for generative AI search is optimizing for the search experience, and thus still SEO."

What has changed is clicks. When the AI summary answers a question, fewer people click through. For "how do I..." searches, clicks have fallen a lot; one small legal site kept the same ranking while its monthly clicks went from about 800 to 90. But people searching for someone to come fix something still pick up the

phone. For a local service business, the searches that matter most are the ones that still turn into calls.

What still works, in order

1. Your Google Business Profile

For plumbing, HVAC, and most local trades, the people who do this work every day agree: the Business Profile and the map listing bring in most of the calls, and the website supports the map listing.

- Pick the most specific primary category that fits, then add secondary categories for the other things you actually do.
- Fill in every field: hours, services (with a sentence about each), service area, phone, and website.
- Add photos of real jobs regularly. Weekly is what most people recommend.
- If you work from home, you can hide your address and show a service area instead.
- Make sure you're the owner of the profile, not a past web person or agency.

2. Reviews, steadily

The number of reviews and how recent they are matter for the map results, and they show up in AI answers too. One study of hotels in Barcelona found their AI visibility came down mostly to "traditional SEO and Google review volume."

- Ask at the end of the job, while the customer is happy.
- Make it one step: a small card with a QR code that opens your review box directly.
- Ask them to mention the service ("they replaced our water heater"). That helps the review, and it helps you show up for that service.
- Reply to reviews, good and bad.

- Steady beats a burst. A few every month looks better than twenty in one week and then nothing for a year.

3. One real page for each service

Your website needs a page for each thing you want more of, written so a customer could decide to call you from that page alone. Most won't click around your website for answers.

- Say what you do, where you do it, and a price range if you can.
- Answer the customer's main question in the first sentence or two, under a heading that asks it.
- Use photos of your actual work, not stock photos.
- Answer the questions people ask you on the phone.
- Make sure the words are really on the page. Some sites built with AI tools or heavy page builders show Google a nearly blank page. Search Console's URL Inspection tool will show you what Google sees.

City pages are where people get into trouble. A page for each town you serve is fine if each one has something real on it, like jobs you did there. Thirty copies of the same page with the town name swapped out is exactly what Google's 2026 spam updates went after.

4. A few real links from local places

Google still trusts a site more when other real, visited sites link to it. You need a handful of good ones, not hundreds.

- Your suppliers, manufacturers, and trade associations. Many have "find a dealer" or "find an installer" pages.
- Local groups you belong to or sponsor: your Chamber of Commerce, a youth sports league, a community event.
- Local news. Being quoted in the paper counts.
- Check that your Chamber directory listing actually shows up in Google by searching for your business name along with the Chamber's website. Some directory systems load in a way

Google can't read. The membership is still worth it for the people you meet there; just don't count on the link.

- Don't buy links. Packages of "high authority backlinks" and directory submissions do nothing for you.

5. The same details everywhere, including Bing

- Use the same business name, phone number, and website on Yelp, BBB, your Chamber listing, Facebook, and anywhere else you're listed. A few accurate listings are plenty.
- Set up Bing Places and Bing Webmaster Tools. Both are free, and Bing feeds a lot of what ChatGPT finds.

Getting named in the AI answers

Everything above also feeds the AI answers. These are the parts that matter most for them.

- **Answer your customers' questions on your own pages.** People who track this closely say Google's AI Overviews mostly quote pages already in the top 20 results that answer the question in the first sentence or two. A page headed "How much does a water heater replacement cost in Concord?" is the kind that gets quoted; "Why Choose Us" usually isn't.
- **Get mentioned on other sites.** AI tools repeat what other sites say about a business: review sites, local directories, "best of" lists, news stories, and your trade association's member list. Reviews count here as much as they do on the map.
- **Show up on Bing and Brave.** ChatGPT gets many of its search results from Bing, and Claude uses Brave Search. Plenty of businesses that rank fine on Google barely appear on either. Bing Places and Bing Webmaster Tools fix most of the Bing side, and I'd expect the same basics (a real page for each service, mentions on other sites) to help on Brave.
- **Use the same business name everywhere.** One site in these discussions kept getting mixed up with a better-known company

that had a similar name. A consistent name across your website, your Business Profile, and your listings keeps the AI from confusing you with someone else.

- **Write the facts down.** Prices, service area, hours, and whether you take online bookings. An AI answer can only repeat what's written somewhere it can read.
- **Make sure the AI tools aren't blocked.** Some website hosts and security settings block AI crawlers without the owner knowing. If you want to show up in ChatGPT and Claude, ask whoever runs your site to check that OpenAI's and Anthropic's crawlers can get in.

Don't expect a lot of clicks from AI answers. One affiliate website was cited about 8,000 times in 50 days and got one or two visits a day from it. Where AI pays off is the recommendation: someone asks "who should I call to fix my furnace in Concord," sees your name, and then calls you or searches for you on Google. That's why asking every new customer how they found you matters so much (more on that below).

What's a waste of money right now

- **Separate "AI visibility," "AEO," or "GEO" services.** Most of the people who do SEO for a living call this the same work as SEO under a new name and a higher price. A pool company in Florida paid $4,200 to an "AEO" agency that did backlinks and meta descriptions. If a cold email tells you how many people "search for you in AI," the number is invented; no AI company shares that data.
- **An llms.txt file.** It's been pitched as a way into AI answers. An Ahrefs study of 137,000 sites found 97% of those files went a whole month without a single request, and Google's own guidance lists it as something you can ignore. If it comes free, great. But it's not something worth paying for.
- **Schema or FAQ sections added "for AI."** An Ahrefs study of 1,885 pages that added schema markup found no increase in AI

citations. Schema has other uses; just don't pay extra for it as an AI fix.

- **Publishing lots of pages fast.** Google's updates in May, June, August, and September 2026 all hit sites that published hundreds or thousands of near-identical or mass-produced pages. Some lost 90% of their traffic or more overnight, and the ones that cleaned up afterward mostly haven't recovered yet.
- **Weekly ranking reports.** Third-party rank trackers became unreliable this year; one study found Google was altering about 8% of the results those tools collect. Google itself now says the old "position 1 to 10" is hard to map to what people actually see.
- **"Toxic backlink" cleanups.** Spam sites link to everybody. Google ignores them.

Using AI to write your website

It's fine, with some conditions. Google says it cares whether a page is useful, not who or what wrote it. As of October 1, 2026, its guidance also says it's "critical to manually factcheck and review all AI-generated content for accuracy and trustworthiness before publishing."

- Read every word before it goes up. AI tools make up statistics and sources.
- Add something only you have, like a real job or a number from your own business.
- Go slowly. A page or two at a time is fine. Hundreds at once is the pattern Google penalizes.
- Leave pages that already bring in calls alone. Rewriting a page that's working can drop it for weeks.

How to tell if it's working

- **Google Search Console** is free. It shows which searches you appear for and how many people click, and it has started showing

when you appear in Google's AI results.

- **Your Business Profile's performance page** shows calls, direction requests, and website clicks.
- **Ask every new customer how they found you, and write it down.** People who see you in an AI answer often search your name afterward, so it looks like an ordinary Google search. Asking is the only way to know.
- **If you want to check the AI answers yourself,** ask ChatGPT, Claude, and Google's AI Mode the five questions your customers would ask, once a month, and note whether you're named. Ask each one more than once, because the answers change from one try to the next. Paid tools that sell an "AI visibility score" are working from the same guesswork.
- **Give it time.** Three to six months is normal. A page that already shows up in search can move within a month or two.

If you hire someone

- **You own the accounts.** That means your Business Profile, Search Console, Google Analytics, and your domain name. Anyone you hire should be added as a user, not set up as the owner. One owner on r/SEO tried to leave a three-year arrangement and found the freelancer controlled the accounts.
- **Pay for specific work.** "Fix the profile, write five service pages, and correct these listings" is something you can check. Be wary of packages sold by the number of keywords, and of reports where everything is always green.
- **Avoid long contracts.** Many small businesses need a few months of focused work, not a permanent retainer.
- **Ask three things before you sign:** what they'll do in the first 90 days, how you'll both know it worked, and what happens if you leave.

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The Checklist

Check off what's done. The sections follow the order of the guide, most important first, so start with whatever's still empty near the top.

Business Profile

- [ ] I'm the owner of my Google Business Profile.
- [ ] My primary category is the most specific one that fits.
- [ ] Hours, services, service area, phone, and website are filled in and correct.
- [ ] I've added photos of real jobs in the last month.

Reviews

- [ ] I ask every happy customer for a review at the end of the job.
- [ ] I have a card or link that opens my review box in one step.
- [ ] I've had new reviews in the last 30 days.
- [ ] I reply to reviews.

Website

- [ ] I have one page for each service I want more of.
- [ ] Each page says where I work and gives a price range.
- [ ] Each page answers the customer's main question near the top.
- [ ] The photos are of my own work.
- [ ] Search Console's URL Inspection shows the words on my pages.

Listings and links

- [ ] My name, phone, and website match everywhere I'm listed.
- [ ] I've set up Bing Places and Bing Webmaster Tools.
- [ ] I've asked my suppliers, associations, and local groups for a link.

AI answers

- [ ] My service pages answer the questions customers ask me, near the top.
- [ ] I'm listed on the review sites and directories in my trade.
- [ ] Whoever runs my website has checked that AI search crawlers aren't blocked.
- [ ] Once a month, I ask ChatGPT and Claude the questions my customers would ask and note whether I'm named.

Tracking

- [ ] I'm the owner of my Search Console and Google Analytics accounts.
- [ ] I ask every new customer how they found me.

The checklist, done for you

If you'd rather not work through it yourself, I'll do it. It's one of my **Fix One Thing** fixes, at a fixed price.

Small fix, $350 (about an afternoon)

- Your Google Business Profile corrected and filled in
- A one-step review link and QR code, plus 12 printed review cards that carry it
- Bing Places set up
- Your name, phone, and website matched on your main listings
- You confirmed as the owner of your Business Profile, Search Console, and Google Analytics
- A check that your website isn't blocking Google or the AI crawlers

Full fix, $750 (about a week)

- Everything in the small fix
- Up to five service pages written or rewritten so each answers what customers ask
- Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools set up
- A first check of what ChatGPT and Claude say when asked your customers' questions

Done means every item on the list is finished. Rankings take months and nobody can promise them, so they aren't the test. Paid upfront; if something on the list isn't done when I'm finished, you get a full refund.

Want a website built this way from the start and looked after for you? That's website design and hosting, from $150 a month.

Book a free 20-minute chat and mention the guide:
klassconcepts.com/contact

Where this comes from

I analyzed 198 discussions from r/SEO, a Reddit community with more than 500,000 members, posted between April and October 2026. They include comments from Google's John Mueller. I checked what they said against Google's own published guidance and the studies they cited. I'm not an SEO agency, and I've left out anything I couldn't tie to a source or to more than one person's experience. Search changes quickly, so this guide has an edition date and I'll update it.

- Google Search Central: guide to optimizing for generative AI features in Search (May 2026)
- Google Search Central: spam policies, including scaled content abuse
- Google Search Central: guidance on AI-generated content (updated October 1, 2026)
- Ahrefs: llms.txt usage across 137,000 sites (2026)
- Ahrefs: schema markup and AI citations, 1,885 pages against 4,000 controls (2026)
- Ahrefs: 1.4 million ChatGPT prompts and the pages they cite (2026)
- Nozzle: altered search results served to rank trackers (2026)
- John Mueller (Google), comments in r/SEO (May and September 2026)

October 2026 edition. Next update planned for January 2027. The latest edition is always at klassconcepts.com/getting-found.