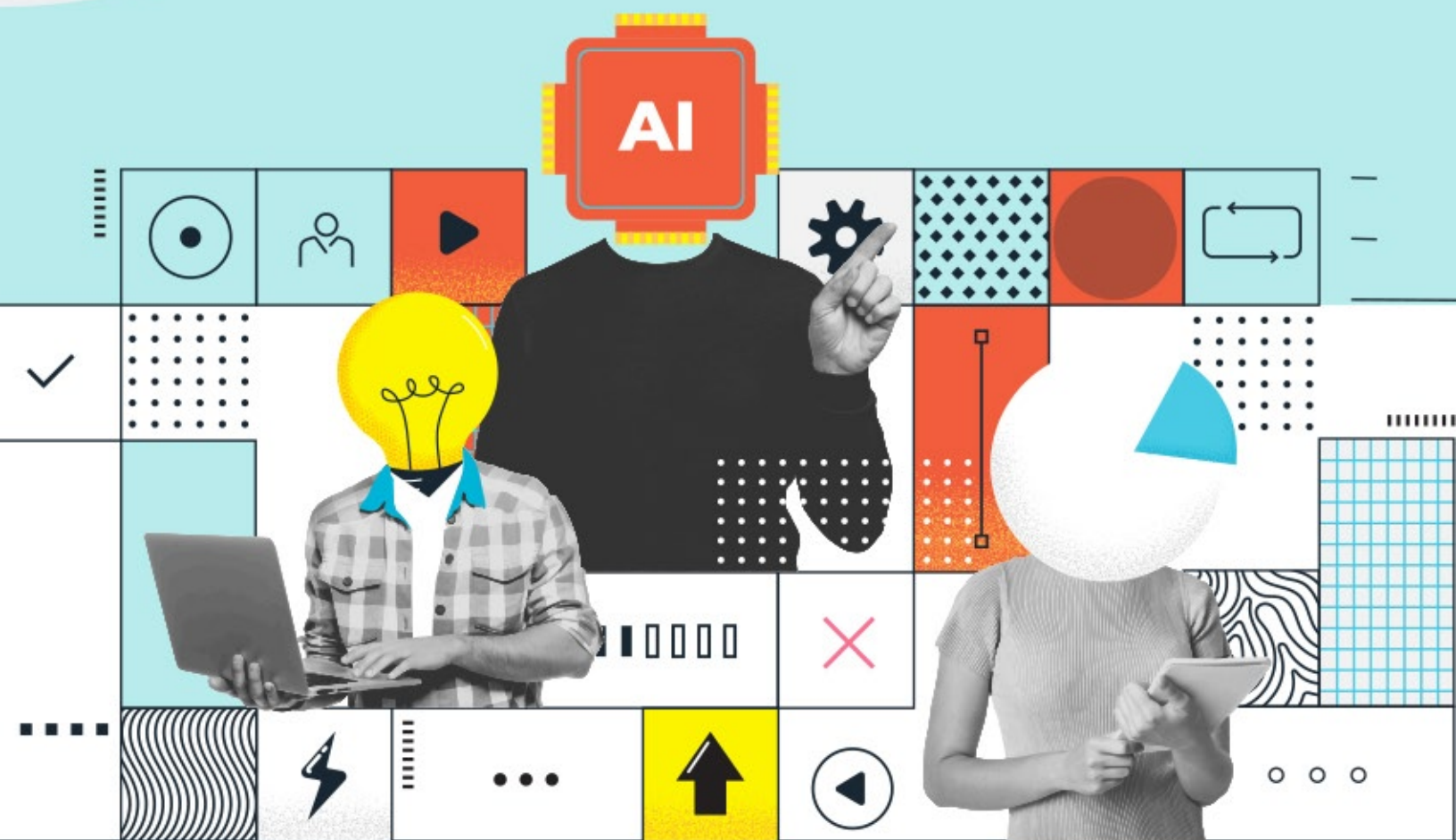


AI Search Domination:

The Local Business Guide to
Ranking on Google AI, Ask
Maps, and ChatGPT



**How to get your business recommended by AI
before your competitors are.**

Why AI Search Is Your Next Opportunity

The water heater dies on a Tuesday night. Ten years ago you would search for a plumber, click three links, and start dialing. Today a growing number of people open ChatGPT or ask Google a full question, describe the problem, and ask who to call. That shift is real and it is measurable. Roughly 57% of consumers now use AI tools to find local businesses at least once a month. And when those tools answer, they do not make the recommendation up. They cite sources they trust. This guide is about becoming one of those sources.

First, an honest word about what this is:

Optimizing for AI search is not a separate discipline.

Roughly 98% of the work is the same work that has always made a local business rank well: a clean, accurate Google Business Profile, a website that says the same thing your profile says, real reviews on more than one platform, and genuine mentions of your name across the internet.

Anyone selling you "AI SEO" as a separate product at a separate price is selling you something you should already be getting. The 2% that is genuinely different is covered in this guide too, but it is a handful of line items, not a different service.

What you will learn

- Why your Google Business Profile and your website are still the foundation of all of it
- The four places local customers now find businesses, and what each one pulls from
- Why one platform now shapes AI local recommendations more than every competitor combined
- Why you only need to win a handful of queries, not a thousand keywords
- Eight steps to make AI notice your business
- The mistakes that quietly cost businesses visibility right now



Google Search Still Runs The Show



Nothing in this guide means Google matters less. The AI channels are growing fast from a small base. The map pack is still where most local calls come from today. What follows is about adding channels on top of a foundation, not replacing the foundation. And the foundation is two things.

Your Google Business Profile



Still the single most important asset in local search. It decides whether you appear in the map pack, it costs nothing, and it is the first thing every AI channel reads when it looks you up. A business with a neglected profile is invisible in all four channels at once.



Your website

Where Google confirms what your profile claims, and where AI goes to read the detail a profile cannot hold. A profile with no site behind it is a claim with no evidence.



**Get these two right and you
have done most of the work for
all four channels at once.**

Your Profile And Website Have To Agree

The most common reason a business gets passed over is not a missing tactic. It is two sources telling slightly different stories about the same company.



On your GBP

- ✓ The correct primary category, then secondary categories that genuinely apply
- ✓ Every service listed by name
- ✓ Accurate hours and an accurate service area
- ✓ Real photos, added regularly
- ✓ Questions answered before customers have to ask them



On your website

- ✓ A real page for each service you offer, not one page listing everything
- ✓ The same name, address and phone, formatted the same way
- ✓ The same service area, described in the same words
- ✓ Fast, plain pages a crawler can actually read



When they disagree, both get discounted.

When they match, both get stronger. This is the cheapest win available to most businesses, and it is the one most often left undone.

The Four Places Customers Find You Now

For most of the last decade there was one game: show up in the map pack, the three businesses that appear above the search results. Now there are four places to be found, and each one decides who to show using different information.



The Google Map Pack

The three-business block with a map. It still runs mostly on proximity, relevance, and trust, and the algorithm has not changed much in a decade. If you are close to the searcher and your profile is solid, you show up.

Google AI Overview

The AI-written answer at the top of search results. Rare on short searches, near-universal on conversational ones. It runs on Gemini, and it weighs authority and mentions far more heavily than proximity.

Ask Maps

Google's AI built into Google Maps. It answers questions by reading review text and business attributes, not just by measuring distance. If someone asks for a place with weekend hours and free parking, Ask Maps goes looking for those words.

ChatGPT

Pulls local business data from Bing for Business, from mentions of your name across the web, and, under a licensing agreement signed in 2026, directly from Yelp's database of reviews and photos.

How AI Search Works

Think of Google Search like a librarian pointing you to a shelf of books. You still have to read the books to find your answer.

Think of AI Search like a librarian who has read every book and gives you the answer directly, with a short list of sources.

Both care about the same two things:

1. **Relevance** – Does what you published actually answer the question being asked?
2. **Authority** – Are you a source worth trusting?

Where they part ways

Google leans on

Backlinks, domain age, and proximity to the searcher.

AI leans on

How often it has seen your business mentioned across the internet, whether your details are consistent everywhere it looks, and whether your content answers questions clearly in plain, human language.

One more difference worth knowing

AI matches details far more precisely than classic search ever did. Things like free parking, wheelchair access, weekend hours, Spanish spoken, financing available, same-day appointments used to be near-irrelevant metadata. To an AI answering a real question, those details often are the answer.

Which means the small fields you have been ignoring on your profile are now doing real work.



The Single Biggest Shift: Yelp

An independent study analyzed citations across more than 28 million AI responses to local business queries on ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, and Google AI Mode. It compared six local discovery platforms: Yelp, the Better Business Bureau, Angi, Thumbtack, HomeAdvisor, and Nextdoor.



Yelp received 3.4 times more AI citations than the next closest platform.
In the fourth quarter of 2025 alone, Yelp accumulated 512,680 citations.
That is more than the other five platforms combined.

Three findings that should change what you do



More than half of Yelp's citations come from "near me" questions.

Yelp generated roughly 290,000 "near me" citations in a single quarter. The other five platforms produced about 87,000 between them. When somebody asks an AI tool to find a provider nearby, Yelp is shaping that answer more often than everyone else put together.



Category questions beat brand questions, by a lot.

Between 91 and 97% of citations came from category questions like "best hair salon near me", not from people searching a business by name. Brand recognition alone will not get you cited. The citations happen earlier, while the customer is still deciding who to consider.



ChatGPT now reads Yelp directly.

In July 2026, Yelp began licensing its reviews, photos, and business information to OpenAI. ChatGPT surfaces that content inside its answers, with Yelp branding and links. Yelp's Request a Quote feature is being added as well, which will let people contact local providers without ever leaving the chat window.

Sources: Foundation Marketing research in partnership with AirOps, published 2026. Axios, July 23, 2026.

What To Do About Yelp *

The instruction here is narrower than you might expect, and one part of it is the opposite of common advice.



Do this

- ✓ **Claim your page.** If you have never claimed it, there is a good chance a page already exists with wrong hours and no photos. That page is being read by AI right now.
- ✓ **Make it complete.** Hours, service area, categories, services, phone, website, and every attribute that genuinely applies to you.
- ✓ **Add real photos.** Plenty of them, and keep adding. Photos are part of what makes the page a credible source.
- ✓ **Match it to your Google profile exactly.** Same name, same address format, same phone. Inconsistency is the most common reason AI gets confused about who you are.
- ✓ **Respond to every review.** Positive and negative. Responses are public, they are read, and they show a business that is present.



Do not do this

- ✗ **Never ask customers for Yelp reviews.**

This is against Yelp policy. Businesses caught soliciting get a public warning badge displayed on their profile for anyone to see, and the solicited reviews usually get removed anyway. You end up with the penalty and none of the benefit.

Ask for reviews on Google, where asking is allowed. Let Yelp reviews arrive on their own, and put your energy into the profile itself.

You Only Need To Win 10 to 75

The old approach to search was to chase hundreds of keywords and hope volume added up. AI discovery does not work that way, and the math is genuinely good news for a small business.

Here is what the research found. On one AI platform, just 24 unique versions of "plumber near me" produced 1,168 cited answers in a single quarter. The same handful of questions, asked over and over by different people, pulling from the same source every time. For handyman services, four unique questions produced 332 answers across two platforms.



The multiplier is the whole point.

You do not need to be the answer to a thousand searches. You need to be the answer to the ten to seventy-five questions that people in your category actually ask, because those few questions get asked thousands of times.

How to find your list

- ➔ Write down every question a customer asks you on the phone before they book. Those are the questions.
- ➔ Add the ones they ask after they book, the ones about price, timing, and what happens next.
- ➔ Ask an AI tool the questions a customer in your area would ask, and see who it names. That list is your competition.
- ➔ Keep the ones with real intent behind them. "top-rated bookkeeper in San Diego" is worth owning. A general question about your industry is not.
- ➔ Then answer each one, in public, on your website and your profiles, in the same words a customer would use.

Source: Foundation Marketing with AirOps, "The LLMs Have Spoken: Yelp is the Top Source for AI Local Search," 2026.

8 Steps to Rank in AI Search

#1

Write The Way Customers Talk

People type full questions into AI tools now, not two-word searches. Your copy has to sound like an answer to a question, not a slogan.



"We bake cakes for all occasions."



"We make custom chocolate and vanilla layer cakes with buttercream flowers for weddings, birthdays, or just a Tuesday treat, ready for pickup in 48 hours."

The second version contains real nouns, real timeframes, and real specifics. Those are the things an AI can match against a question.

#2

Answer Real Questions in Your Headings

Use the actual question as the heading, then answer it in the very first sentence underneath.

Heading: "Is there a dog walker near me who can come midday while I am at work?"

First sentence: a direct, complete answer. Details after.

#3

Fill In Every Detail And Attribute

This is the step almost everyone skips. Go through your Google Business Profile and your Yelp page and fill in every attribute that genuinely applies: free parking, wheelchair access, weekend hours, Spanish spoken, financing available, same-day appointments. Then make sure those same details appear in your website copy.

AI answers questions about specifics. If the detail is not written down anywhere, you cannot be the answer.

#4

Be Original And Specific

Do not copy what competitors have written, and do not publish raw AI-written text. Use AI to help you organize and structure. Write the substance yourself. Share:

- Real jobs you have done, with details
- Your actual process, step by step
- What you charge and what changes the price
- The things you know that a customer would not

#5

Structure Pages So AI Can Read Them

- Short paragraphs and bullets, not walls of text
- Question-based subheadings
- Answer first, detail second
- Plain HTML pages rather than content loaded by scripts, which AI crawlers often do not see

#6

Use Schema Markup

Schema is a small piece of code that labels your information so machines read it correctly. Tag your reviews, FAQs, address, hours, and services.

Free tool: search for "Rank Math" or "Yoast SEO".



#7

Build Mentions, Not Just Links

AI cares about mentions of your business across the web, even when there is no link attached. A mention alone is worth something.

- **General:** Yelp, the Better Business Bureau, Bing Places, Meta, and your local Chamber of Commerce.
- **Industry:** Lawyers: Justia. Health: Zocdoc and Healthgrades. Home services: Angi and Houzz. Restaurants: OpenTable and TripAdvisor.
- **Press:** A modest monthly press release that reaches Google News builds your name as a known entity. It helps rankings and AI citations at the same time.
- **Local:** Sponsorships, community events, and local associations. These are mentions that are hard to fake and easy for AI to trust.

#8

Be The Expert Everywhere

- Post short how-to videos on YouTube and embed them on your site. Gemini is the only major AI model trained natively on video, so this is one of the few places where the work genuinely is different.
- Make sure your Bing for Business listing exists and mirrors your Google profile exactly. This is where ChatGPT looks.
- Publish honest pricing content tied to your city, like "How much does a deep clean cost in Chula Vista?". AI tools usually know where the person asking is located, and they favor businesses that are transparent about cost.
- Share what you know on the platforms where people actually discuss your trade.

Capture the interest you create

Visibility only matters if a visitor has an obvious next step. Every page needs a phone number, a booking button, or a form above the fold.

Reviews: What Changed

Reviews used to be a numbers game. Get more stars than the business down the street. That is no longer what decides whether AI recommends you.

Change one: reviews need to live in more than one place



If every review you have is on Google, you are optimizing for the map pack and leaving the AI channels empty. Google's own AI Overview and ChatGPT both weigh Yelp heavily. Build presence on Google, Yelp, Facebook, and Bing.

Remember the rule from earlier: ask on Google, never ask on Yelp.

Change two: what the review says now matters more than the star count



AI systems read the text. If someone asks for a provider who offers financing, the AI is scanning review text for the word financing. A five-star review that says "great service" gives it nothing to work with.

Instead of "would you mind leaving us a quick review?"

Try: "Thanks for choosing us. Would you mind sharing what we did and how it went?"

Detail-rich reviews are what get matched to real questions.

Change three: who sends the request decides whether it works



A review request sent personally by the owner, from the phone number the customer already knows, converts at roughly 46%. An automated message sent from a system converts at under 4%. The difference is not the wording. It is who it came from.

Two things to avoid

- Offering anything in exchange for a review. It violates platform rules.
- A perfect 5.0 rating across hundreds of reviews. It reads as suspicious to customers and to the platforms.

Mistakes That Quietly Cost You

These are the ones we see most often, and every one of them was considered fine advice at some point in the last two years.

⊗ **Putting AI-generated images on your Google profile**

Image models now fingerprint their own output. Google can identify AI-generated images regardless of how they were edited afterward. Use real photos on your profile. AI images on your website are still fine but not recommended.

⊗ **Changing your business name, address, or primary category casually**

Any of those three can trigger re-verification, and your profile can go dark while you sort it out. Make those changes deliberately, not on a whim.

⊗ **Appealing a suspension before you have your documents together**

You generally get two appeals. Gather every document you have before you submit the first one.

⊗ **Publishing thin city pages**

Pages that swap the city name and change nothing else are treated as spam. One well-built page for the area you actually serve beats twenty hollow ones.

⊗ **Chasing a national audience**

Going national means competing with every large company in the country. Local is dramatically easier to win and the customers are the ones who can actually hire you.

⊗ **Assuming the map pack is the whole game**

AI results overlap with the map pack only 30 to 40% of the time. Ranking well on the map is worth having. It is not the same as being recommended.

AI Ranking Checklist

Foundation

- ☐ Claim your Yelp page and fill it out completely, with real photos
- ☐ Claim your Bing Places listing and mirror your Google profile exactly
- ☐ Fill in every attribute that applies on both Google and Yelp
- ☐ Confirm your name, address, and phone match exactly everywhere
- ☐ Respond to every review on every platform

Content

- ☐ Write down the 10 to 75 questions your customers actually ask
- ☐ Turn each question into a heading with a direct answer underneath
- ☐ Publish honest pricing content for your city
- ☐ Rewrite your service descriptions with real specifics
- ☐ Post short how-to videos to YouTube and embed them

Authority

- ☐ Apply schema markup to your site
- ☐ Claim and correct your listings on the directories for your trade
- ☐ Get mentioned locally through sponsorships or associations
- ☐ Publish a press release that reaches Google News

Habits

- ☐ Ask for reviews personally, from your own phone, never on Yelp
- ☐ Ask customers to describe what was done, not just to leave stars
- ☐ Add new photos to your profiles every month

Resource List

Free schema tools

- rankmath.com
- yoast.com

Where to claim your listings

- biz.yelp.com
- bingplaces.com
- business.google.com
- mapsconnect.apple.com
- bbb.org
- Your local Chamber of Commerce

Industry directories

- Lawyers: Justia. Health: Zocdoc and Healthgrades. Home services: Angi and Houzz. Restaurants: OpenTable and TripAdvisor.

Worth reading

- Foundation Marketing, "The LLMs Have Spoken: Yelp is the Top Source for AI Local Search", <https://foundationinc.co/lab/yelp-ai-local-discovery/>
- Axios, "Yelp partners with ChatGPT to surface reviews," July 23, 2026, <https://www.axios.com/2026/07/23/yelp-reviews-chatgpt-geo-partnership>



Your Next Step

Everything in this guide is work you can do yourself.

What it requires is time, and doing it in the right order, and keeping it going every month after the first burst of effort wears off. That last part is where most businesses stop.

If you would rather not do it yourself, this is the work we do:

- A full audit of your Google Business Profile, your Yelp page, and every listing carrying your name
- Profile optimization across Google, Yelp, and Bing, with every detail matched
- Verified citations built across the platforms AI checks to confirm a business is real
- A website structured to answer the questions your customers actually ask, aligned to your profile
- Content written for the specific questions that get asked in your category and your city
- Schema markup applied so machines read your information correctly
- Local authority built through mentions, press, and community presence
- Review strategy that stays inside the rules on every platform
- Monthly rank tracking so you can see where you actually stand

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