

The Local SEO Checklist for Small Businesses

The 2026 framework ScaleLocal uses to get service businesses found on Google, Bing, and AI search — in priority order. Built to apply to any local market, anywhere in the country.

1. Google Business Profile — the foundation

Your Google Business Profile is the single biggest factor in local search. If you do nothing else on this list, do this.

- ✓ Claim and verify your profile
- ✓ Fill out every field — name, address, phone, hours, categories, service area, attributes
- ✓ Add 20+ photos — exterior, interior, team, work examples
- ✓ Write a keyword-rich description — include your city and services (750 characters max)
- ✓ Post weekly — updates, offers, tips. Consistency beats brilliance
- ✓ Enable messaging so customers can reach you directly
- ✓ List every service you offer, with descriptions
- ✓ Respond to every review within 24 hours — positive and negative

2. Website fundamentals

Your site does not need to be fancy. It needs to be fast, mobile-friendly, and clear about what you do and where.

- ✓ Mobile-first design — most local searches happen on phones
- ✓ Page speed under 3 seconds — test at Google PageSpeed Insights
- ✓ NAP consistency — identical Name, Address, Phone everywhere
- ✓ One page per service — not a single 'Our Services' page
- ✓ City in every page title — 'Emergency Plumber [Your City]'
- ✓ Schema markup — LocalBusiness structured data at minimum
- ✓ SSL certificate — HTTPS is a ranking factor

3. Citations and directories

Citations are mentions of your business name, address, and phone on other sites. Google uses them to confirm you are real.

- ✓ Build citations on the major directories — Google, Bing Places, Apple Maps, Yelp, Facebook, and industry-specific directories
- ✓ Keep NAP identical everywhere — 'St' vs 'Street' counts as inconsistent
- ✓ Claim and verify each profile — do not just get listed

4. Reviews — your competitive moat

Automate the ask, respond to every review, and focus on a steady stream of new reviews over time. Never buy or incentivize reviews.

- ✓ Ask every satisfied customer, with a one-click review link
- ✓ Respond to every review — response rate is itself a signal
- ✓ Aim for steady velocity, not a one-time burst

5. Content that ranks

Google rewards sites that demonstrate real expertise about your service and your area.

- ✓ Blog posts answering questions customers actually search
- ✓ Location-specific content for the towns you serve
- ✓ A separate, substantive page for each service area

6. AI search visibility — the 2026 frontier

When someone asks ChatGPT, Gemini, or Perplexity for a local recommendation, those tools pull from structured, consistent, well-reviewed businesses.

- ✓ Clean, complete schema markup so AI engines can read your business
- ✓ A consistent business identity across the web
- ✓ Well-structured, factual content AI engines can quote

7. Track everything

You cannot improve what you do not measure.

- ✓ Google Analytics 4 on your website
- ✓ Google Search Console — see what you rank for
- ✓ Call tracking — know where each lead came from
- ✓ Monthly review of Google Business Profile insights

See exactly where your business stands

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