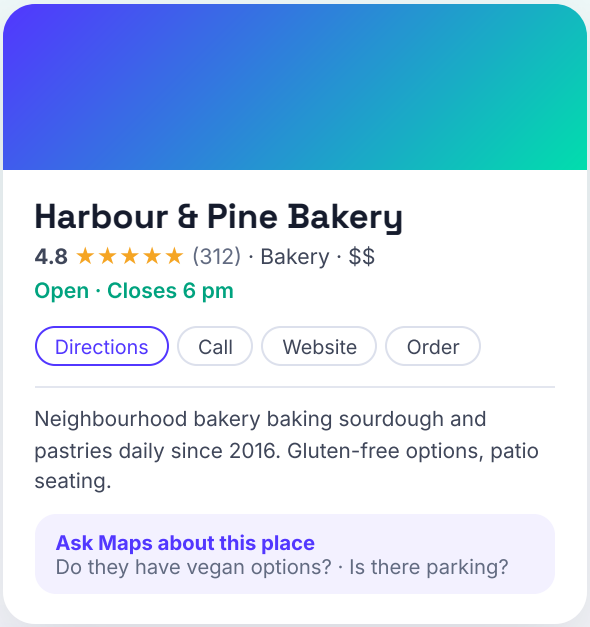
Google Business Profile For Local SEO and AI

How to set up, complete and grow a Business Profile that ranks in Maps and local search, earns trust through reviews, and feeds the AI answers customers now ask before they visit.

Guide · Local SEO and generative engine optimization

WHAT CUSTOMERS SEE BEFORE THEY EVER REACH YOUR WEBSITE



Name, category, hours
Real-world, consistent, accurate

Reviews
Genuine, recent, answered

Ask Maps
AI answers from your profile, reviews and website

3	0	1
local ranking factors	ways to pay for better local rank	profile per business

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How it works

Relevance, distance and prominence

Google says local results are mainly based on **relevance, distance and prominence**, and that there is **no way to request or pay** for a better local ranking. [1]

Relevance

How well you match the search

· Primary and secondary **categories**

· Complete, detailed **profile info** [1]

· Services, products, attributes

· Website content that backs it up

Distance

How far you are from the searcher

· Uses the searcher's location, or what Google knows about it [1]

· You can't change it

· Accurate address or **service area** [2]

Prominence

How well known you are

· **Reviews**: how many, and ratings [1]

· **Websites linking** to your business [1]

· Mentions, press, directories

· Recognition offline

What this means in practice

You control **relevance** almost completely: categories, profile details, website.
You can't move **distance**. So rank where you are, and don't fake an address. [2]
Prominence is earned: reviews, links, mentions, and being known offline. [1]
Google also says businesses with **complete and accurate info** are more likely to show. [1]

What Kopp's research adds

Trial testimony showed Google's NavBoost uses **device and location** to tell intents apart. A brand search on mobile may favour **maps and locations**; on desktop, the homepage. [7]
AI systems build a **composite profile** of a brand from fragments: website, reviews, directories, social, news. Consistent fragments get recommended; contradictory ones get skipped. [6]
Your Business Profile is one of the **most trusted fragments** for any local business.

The short version

Be **accurate** (name, address, hours, categories), be **complete** (every relevant field), and be **prominent** (reviews, links, mentions). Everything else in this guide is how.

Part 1

Set up the basics right

Most suspensions and ranking problems start here. Google's guidelines are specific. [2]

Field	Google's rule [2]	Common mistake
Business name	Your **real-world name**, as used consistently on storefront, website and stationery	Adding keywords or locations: *"Shelly's Coffee Best Latte Downtown SF"*
Address	Precise, accurate, real-world location. P.O. boxes and remote mailboxes aren't allowed	Virtual offices and coworking addresses that aren't staffed
Service area	Service-area businesses: **one profile** for the central office, with a service area	Listing a home address publicly, or one profile per city
Categories	The **fewest** categories that describe your **overall core business**	Ten categories for every service you offer
Hours	Regular customer-facing hours, plus special hours for holidays	Wrong holiday hours. Appointment-only businesses showing hours
Profiles	Only **one profile per business**	Duplicates from old owners or agencies
Chains	Same name and category across locations in a country	Each location naming itself differently

Name: *Shelly's Coffee | 24 Hour Coffee Shop Downtown San Francisco*

Name: *Shelly's Coffee*. Hours: **Open 24 hours**. Category: **Coffee shop**. Address in the address field. [2]

Google's own example. Details belong in their fields

Verify

Google says verification tells it you're **authorized to represent the business**, so the profile is **more likely to show** in results. [1] Do it before anything else.

Part 2

Complete every field that applies

Completeness is a stated local ranking tip, and every field is a **fact Google and AI can repeat** about you. [1]

Field	What to put there	Why it matters
Primary category	The single best description of the business	The strongest relevance signal you control
Secondary categories	Only true, core additions	Covers real secondary searches
Description	Services, products, mission and history. No links, no promos [2]	Context for customers and AI summaries
Services and products	Every service with a plain description, plus prices where you can	Matches specific searches and AI questions
Attributes	Parking, Wi-Fi, accessibility, payments, identity attributes that apply [1]	Answers "does it have...?" questions directly
Photos and videos	Exterior, interior, team, work, products. Real, current, frequent [1]	Show what customers will find
Links	Website (the right location page), booking, menu, ordering	Sends traffic to the page that converts
In-store products	Retail only, in eligible regions [1]	Can show stock in local results

Write a description that works

Lead with **what you are** and **where**:
"Neighbourhood bakery in Kitsilano, Vancouver."
Add **what makes you different**: specialties, years, credentials.
Use the **same one-liner** as your website and socials (see the Brand Consistency guide).
No keyword lists, no URLs, no phone numbers in the text.

Photos that earn clicks

Show the **entrance** so people recognise it on arrival.
Use **real photos**, not stock. Your team, your space, your work.
Add new photos **regularly**, especially after changes.
Name image files descriptively before uploading. It doesn't hurt and keeps your library organised.

Part 3

Reviews: earn them, answer them

Google lists reviews as part of **prominence**: more reviews and positive ratings **can help** local ranking. [1] They're also what customers and AI read most.

Allowed and encouraged

Ask **every** customer for a review, by email, text, QR code or receipt.
Make it easy: a direct **review link** from your profile.
Ask for **specific** reviews: *"What did you order? How was the service?"* Detail helps future customers and AI answers.
Reply to reviews. Google says replies show you value feedback. [1]

Not allowed [3]

Paying or rewarding for reviews: money, discounts, free goods or services.
Asking for a review to be **changed or removed** in exchange for an incentive.
Review gating: discouraging negative reviews or **selectively asking** happy customers only.
Reviews from **employees**, family or anyone with a **conflict of interest**.
Posting reviews on **competitors** to hurt them.

Reply: *"Thanks!"* to every review, or nothing to negative ones.

Reply: *"Thanks, Maya. Glad the **gluten-free sourdough** worked for your party. See you at the **Kitsilano** shop!"*

Personal, specific, and repeats true facts about you

Negative reply: arguing, sharing customer details, or a copy-paste apology.

Negative reply: acknowledge, explain what changed, invite them to contact you **offline**.

Calm and useful. Future customers read replies, not just ratings

Part 4

Q&A is gone. Ask Maps answers for you

Google **discontinued** Business Profile Q&A after retiring its Q&A API in late 2025. [5] In March 2026 it introduced **Ask Maps**, a Gemini-powered conversational experience in Google Maps. [4]

How Ask Maps works

People ask Maps natural questions: *"somewhere relaxed for a low-key birthday dinner"*, or *"do they have parking?"* on your profile. [4][5]
Google says Maps draws on information from **over 300 million places**, including reviews from **more than 500 million contributors**. [4]
Answers about a business draw on its **Business Profile, reviews and website**, then **third-party sources** if needed. [5]

What that means for you

You can't write the answer anymore. You can only make sure the **sources say the right thing**.
Gaps in your profile get filled by **reviews or other sites**, accurate or not.
Detailed reviews now do double duty: **social proof** and **AI source material**.

Question customers ask	Where the answer should live
"Do they have parking / wheelchair access?"	Profile **attributes**, website FAQ
"Do they have vegan options?"	**Services / menu**, description, website menu page
"Is it good for groups?"	Attributes, photos, website, and **reviews that mention groups**
"How much does it cost?"	Services with **prices**, website pricing page
"Do they deliver to my area?"	**Service area**, website delivery page

Move your old Q&A content

Take the best questions from your old Q&A, your inbox and your staff, and answer them **on your website** (FAQ or service pages) and in **profile fields**. That's where Ask Maps looks first.

Part 5

Your website and location pages

Your profile and your website should **confirm each other**. Inconsistent facts weaken both, for Google and for AI. [6]

Location pages

One **page per location** with a unique address, hours, map, photos and local details.
Link each profile to its **own location page**, not the homepage.
Add what's true and local: neighbourhood, parking, nearby landmarks, local team.
Service-area businesses: pages for **real service areas** with real content, not city-name swaps.

LocalBusiness markup [8]

Use the most specific **LocalBusiness subtype** (for example Bakery, Dentist).
Include **name, address, phone, hours, geo coordinates** and URL.
Match the profile **exactly**: same name, same hours, same phone.
Add **sameAs** links to your profile and social accounts (see the Schema Inheritance guide).

Fact	Profile	Website	Must match?
Business name	Name field	Header, footer, schema	**Exactly**
Address / area	Address or service area	Location page, schema	**Exactly**
Phone	Primary phone	Location page, schema	**Exactly**
Hours and holiday hours	Hours, special hours	Location page, schema	**Exactly**
Category and services	Categories, services	Headings, service pages	Same meaning

Track the clicks

Add **UTM tags** to the profile's website link (for example `utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=gbp`) so profile traffic shows separately in analytics.

Part 6

Prominence beyond the profile

Google says prominence also draws on **how many websites link to your business**. [1] Off-profile signals are what separate similar businesses at the same distance.

1

Local links

Chamber of commerce, business associations, local sponsorships, suppliers, event pages. **Real relationships**, local relevance.

2

Citations and directories

Industry and local directories with the **same name, address and phone**. Fix wrong listings before adding new ones.

3

Local press and community

Openings, awards, events, expert comments. Coverage creates **mentions and links**.

4

Review platforms

Industry review sites matter too. AI answers often cite **Tripadvisor, Yelp** and vertical platforms.

5

Social profiles

Same name, logo and one-liner everywhere. Another **consistent fragment**. [6]

6

Brand searches

People searching your name is a sign of prominence. **Offline marketing** feeds online signals.

Consistency over volume

Kopp's research on AI brand profiles shows **contradictions cost more than gaps**. [6] Ten consistent listings beat fifty that disagree on your name or category. (See the Brand Consistency and Backlinks guides.)

Part 7

Posts, updates and staying safe

Keep the profile alive

Posts for events, offers and news. Keep them useful and in your brand voice.
Update **special hours** before every holiday.
Add new **services, products and photos** as they change.
Check **suggested edits** from Google and users. Accept what's right, fix what's wrong.
Promotions and contests must **link to clear terms**, and you must honour them. [2]

What gets profiles suspended [2]

Keywords or locations stuffed into the name.
Virtual offices or unstaffed addresses for service-area businesses.
Multiple profiles for one business.
Showing an address **without permanent signage** at that address.
Fake or incentivised **reviews**. [3]

Situation	What to do
Profile suspended	Fix the cause first, then appeal with evidence (signage photos, business licence, utility bill)
Duplicate profile	Claim it and request a merge or removal through support
Competitor keyword-stuffing its name	Suggest an edit with the real name; escalate if needed
Fake reviews on your profile	Report each one as a policy violation; reply calmly in the meantime
Wrong info appearing in AI answers	Fix the profile, website and the third-party source it came from

Ownership

Keep the profile owned by the **business**, not an agency or ex-employee. Add managers as needed. Losing access to a profile is one of the most common and painful local SEO problems.

Part 8

Measuring local performance

Measure **actions**, not just views. A profile that ranks but doesn't get calls or directions isn't doing its job.

Metric	Where	What it tells you
Searches for the business, and the terms used	Business Profile performance	Which queries find you: brand vs category
Views on Search and Maps	Business Profile performance	Visibility trend
Calls, direction requests, website clicks, bookings	Business Profile performance	Real customer actions
Sessions and conversions from the profile	Analytics, with UTM tags	Revenue impact
Rank by location	Geo-grid rank tracking tools	How visibility changes across your area
Review count, rating and replies	Profile, review tools	Prominence and responsiveness
AI answers about you	Ask Maps, AI Mode, ChatGPT, Perplexity prompts	Whether AI describes you correctly (see the Prompt Library guides)

Monthly routine

Review performance: searches, actions, top queries.
Reply to every new review.
Check hours, photos and suggested edits.
Ask **three to five local AI prompts** and note what's said about you.

Expect variation

Local results depend on **where the searcher is standing**. One rank check from your office tells you little. Use a **grid of locations** across your service area.

Checklist and sources

Business Profile checklist

Setup and profile

[ ] Profile **verified** and owned by the business
[ ] **Real-world name**, no keywords
[ ] Accurate **address or service area**
[ ] **Fewest** categories that fit the core business
[ ] Hours and **holiday hours** correct
[ ] Description, services, attributes and photos **complete**
[ ] Links to the right **location page**, with UTM tags

Growth and upkeep

[ ] Review requests sent to **every** customer
[ ] **Every** review answered
[ ] No incentives, no **review gating**
[ ] Old Q&A answers moved to **website and profile fields**
[ ] Website and **LocalBusiness** schema match exactly
[ ] Directories and local links **consistent**
[ ] Monthly check of **performance and AI answers**

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