

Free guide 2 of 3: Google search and AI

Found by Google and AI

What changed in 2026, and the fixes that matter for a small business website. Plain English, no jargon.

SEO means one thing for a small business: when someone types **roofer Newcastle** into Google, or asks an AI **who's a good roofer in Newcastle**, your name comes up. That's the whole job. You don't need to understand the rest of it, and most of what gets sold as SEO doesn't apply to a business your size. Below: what changed this year, then the fixes that matter, in order.

What changed in 2026

Google put an AI answer above the results. In May 2026 Google merged AI Overviews and AI Mode into one search experience, live worldwide. For a lot of searches the AI's answer now sits at the top and names businesses directly. Google's own guidance says the same things still decide who gets named: useful pages it can read, accurate details, and a good experience on a phone.

Maps is going conversational. Ask Maps launched in March 2026 (US and India first) so people can ask Maps a full question instead of typing two words. Expect it in the UK; it reads the same listing and website you're fixing here.

For trades, the map still wins. Industry analyses this year put the AI answer on well under one in ten trade + town searches. When someone searches **emergency plumber Cardiff**, they mostly still get three businesses on a map. So do the Google Maps guide first. This one is the second job.

Three updates in spring 2026. A spam update and a core update in March, another core update in May. The pattern across all three: copy-paste pages and AI-written filler lose ground; pages written by the person who does the work, about real jobs, hold or climb.

Sources: Google I/O, May 2026; Google Search Status Dashboard (March and May 2026 updates); Google Search Central guidance on AI features; Affinco and Search Engine Journal analyses, 2026

The fixes, in order



1. A literal headline

Do this: The first line on your homepage says the service and the city: **Roof repairs and re-slating in Newcastle**. Not Quality you can trust. Not your slogan.

Why: Google and its AI take the headline as the plainest statement of what the page is about. A homeowner takes it the same way. A clever line makes both of them guess.



2. One page per service, one per city, each with real words

Do this: A page for each thing you sell (Boiler repair in Nottingham, Bathroom fitting in Nottingham) and one for each city you genuinely cover. Each page gets its own words: what you do there, a photo from a job in that city, a from price, one review. Five real pages beat thirty copies.

Why: Each page can match one search well. Thirty near-identical plumber in [town] pages with the town swapped is exactly what the March 2026 spam update was built to catch.

Source: Google Search Central, spam policies (scaled content abuse); Google Search Status Dashboard, March 2026



3. A description on every photo (alt text)

Do this: Every photo on the site carries a hidden line of text called alt text. Fill it in with what and where: **Re-slanted pitched roof on a terraced house in Heaton, Newcastle**, not IMG_2041 or roof. Whoever built your site can show you where it goes; on Wix, Squarespace or WordPress it's a field on each image.

Why: Google and AI can't see your pictures. They read the text attached to them. Twenty job photos with proper descriptions is twenty small proofs of what you do and where. It's also what screen readers use.

Source: Google Search Central, image best practices



4. The page title and the grey line under it

Do this: The blue link in Google is the page title: **Roofer in Newcastle | [Your business name]**, under 60 characters. The grey text under it is the description: one honest sentence with the city and your phone number, under 155 characters. Set them per page.

Why: These two lines are what a person reads before choosing which result to tap. Google writes its own if you leave them blank, and it isn't as good at your business as you are.

Source: Google Search Central, title links and snippets



5. Reviews written on the page

Do this: Copy three to five real Google reviews onto the page as text, with the first name and area (Sarah, Jesmond). Not a see our reviews on Google link.

Why: Showing the actual reviews on the site raised the likelihood of an enquiry by up to 270% in the Spiegel study. Almost nobody clicks through to check a profile; they read what's in front of them.

Source: Spiegel Research Center, Northwestern University, 2017

6. Fast on a phone

Do this: Go to pagespeed.web.dev, paste your address, look at the mobile result. The number to care about is LCP; the target is under 2.5 seconds. The cheapest fixes: shrink photos to under 300KB each before uploading, and remove sliders and autoplay video from the top of the page.

Why: Every tenth of a second on mobile load moved lead-generation bounce rate by about 8% across 30 million sessions. Most trade websites lose people before the page has finished loading.

Source: Deloitte and Google, *Milliseconds Make Millions*, 2019

7. An About page with your face on it

Do this: A real photo of you, how long you've been going, accreditations with the number (Gas Safe reg no., NICEIC, TrustMark), and your public liability cover amount. Three short paragraphs.

Why: It's usually the second most visited page on a small business site: people are deciding whether to let you into their house. Swapping a stock photo for a real one of the owner lifted conversions 35% in one documented test.

Source: MarketingExperiments (stock vs real photo test); Citizens Advice: 26% of homeowners put off work because they don't know who to trust

8. Answer the questions people actually ask, in full sentences

Do this: A short FAQ on each service page in the words people use: **How much does a rewire cost in Leeds?** Answer: A typical three-bed rewire in Leeds is £X to £Y and takes about a week. The price depends on...

Why: AI assistants quote clear, direct sentences. They can't quote contact us for a quote. A page that answers the question plainly is the one that gets named in the answer.

Source: Google Search Central guidance on AI features in Search, 2026

9. Name, number and areas in the footer, matching Google exactly

Do this: Business name, phone number and the areas you cover at the bottom of every page, spelled exactly as on your Google listing. Link the website from the listing and the listing from the website.

Why: Google and AI cross-check the site against the listing. Matching details are trusted; mismatches are quietly discounted.

Source: Whitespark, *AI Mode guide*, 2026

10. Accreditation numbers and insurance, visible

Do this: Logos with the registration number next to them, and the insurance amount in words: Public liability insured to £2 million.

Why: A number can be checked. A logo on its own can be copied. Both the homeowner and the AI treat the checkable version as proof.

Things that hurt (don't)

Repeating plumber Birmingham fifteen times on a page. Buying links. Publishing pages an AI wrote that you haven't read. Fake reviews or star ratings coded into the page. Hiding your prices completely. Each of these is either a spam-update target or a trust-killer for the person reading.

Source: Google Search Central spam policies; CMA guidance on fake reviews (DMCC Act 2024)

The ten-minute check

- ☐ Search your trade and city in a private tab. Are you on the map, and on the first page below it?
- ☐ Search your business name. Does your own site come up first, with the right phone number?
- ☐ Open your site on your phone on mobile data, not wifi. Does it load in under three seconds?
- ☐ Is there a price, or a from price, anywhere on the site?
- ☐ Is there a photo of you?
- ☐ Tap the phone number. Does it dial?
- ☐ Read your headline out loud. Does it say what you do and where?

If you'd rather not do any of this yourself

Everything in this guide is part of what I do for clients, for £297 a month: your website, your Google profile, two posts a week on social media, and being found by Google and AI. No setup fee, cancel any month, you own everything.

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