

BizBox

The Small Business SEO & GEO Playbook

How to get found on Google AND AI search
— without paying anyone.

By Kallisti Upton · Business in a Box
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Free. No strings. Because businesses that understand this stuff make better clients.

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Why This Matters Right Now

Right now, there are two ways people find businesses like yours:

1. **Google Search** — Someone types "plumber near me" and picks from the results.
2. **AI Search** — Someone asks ChatGPT, Perplexity, or Google AI "who's the best plumber in Austin?" and gets a direct recommendation.

Most small businesses have at least *some* Google presence. But almost none are set up for AI search. That means when a growing number of customers ask AI for recommendations, those businesses don't exist.

60-70%

of ChatGPT's local business results come from Foursquare data. If you're not on Foursquare, ChatGPT literally cannot recommend you.

3x

more AI citations for businesses with proper schema markup versus those without. Schema is how AI reads and understands your website.

0%

of AI search engines can read your website if it blocks their crawlers — and many website builders do this by default without telling you.

This guide walks you through fixing all of it. Every step is in plain English with copy-paste instructions where possible. No coding experience required for most of it.

SEO in Plain English

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. It's the stuff that determines whether your business shows up when someone Googles what you do.

There are really only 6 things that matter for a small local business:

1. Your Google Business Profile

This is the single most important thing for local SEO. It's the box that shows up on the right side of Google with your hours, phone number, reviews, and map pin. If you don't have one, stop reading and go set one up at business.google.com right now.

2. Your Website Has the Right Words

Google needs to see the words people are searching for on your website. If you're a plumber in Kyle, TX, your site needs to say "plumber in Kyle, TX" — not just "we offer plumbing services." Be specific about your services AND your location on every page.

3. Your Site Loads Fast on Phones

Over 60% of people searching for local businesses are on their phone. If your site takes more than 3 seconds to load, Google pushes you down and visitors leave. Test yours at pagespeed.web.dev — you want a green score.

4. Title Tags and Meta Descriptions

Every page on your website has a title tag (the blue link in Google results) and a meta description (the gray text underneath). These tell Google what each page is about. If yours say "Home" or "Welcome to our website," that's a problem.

■ **TIP: A good title tag formula: [Service] in [City] | [Business Name]**
Example: "24/7 Plumbing Repair in Austin | Smith Plumbing Co."

5. Reviews

More reviews = higher rankings. It's that simple. Ask every happy customer to leave a Google review. Make it easy — text them the direct link. Respond to every review, good or bad.

6. Consistent Business Info Everywhere

Your business name, address, and phone number (NAP) should be identical everywhere — your website, Google, Yelp, Facebook, Apple Maps. Google cross-references these. Inconsistencies = lower trust = lower rankings.

GEO: The New Game

GEO stands for Generative Engine Optimization. It's how you get your business recommended by AI tools like ChatGPT, Google AI Overview, Perplexity, and Claude.

This is different from SEO because AI doesn't just rank links — it reads, understands, and recommends. When someone asks "who's the best tattoo shop in Austin?", AI gives a direct answer with specific business names. You want to be one of those names.

How AI Finds Your Business

AI search engines build their knowledge from several sources:

- 1. Your website** — but only if the AI can crawl it (many sites block AI bots without knowing it) and only if the important stuff is in the HTML (not hidden behind JavaScript).
- 2. Directories** — Foursquare is the big one. It powers 60-70% of ChatGPT's local results. Yelp, Apple Maps, Bing Places, and Google Business Profile also feed into AI knowledge.
- 3. Brand mentions** — When other websites, articles, or social media mention your business by name, AI picks up on it. Brand mentions now matter more than traditional backlinks for AI visibility.
- 4. Schema markup** — This is structured data on your website that tells AI exactly what your business is, where it is, what it does, and what people think of it. Think of it as a cheat sheet for robots.

■■ WARNING: Many website builders and hosting platforms (Wix, Squarespace, Cloudflare) now have "AI bot blocking" features turned on by default. This makes your site completely invisible to ChatGPT and similar tools. Check your robots.txt file immediately.

The 11-Point Checklist

This is what we check on every website we audit. Most local businesses score 2-4 out of 11. Our clients score 11/11. Here's each check and how to fix it yourself.

1. SSL / HTTPS

Your site URL should start with `https://`, not `http://`. This is basic security and Google penalizes sites without it. Most hosts offer free SSL — check your hosting dashboard or call your host and ask them to enable it.

2. robots.txt

This file lives at `yourdomain.com/robots.txt` and tells search engines what they can and can't crawl. You need one, and it should NOT block important pages. If you don't have one, create a text file with this content and upload it to your site root: `User-agent: * Allow: /`

3. AI Bot Access

This is the big GEO one. Your robots.txt must explicitly allow AI crawlers. Add these lines:
`User-agent: GPTBot Allow: /`
`User-agent: ClaudeBot Allow: /`
`User-agent: PerplexityBot Allow: /`
If your site uses Cloudflare, check Settings > Security > Bots and make sure "AI Bot Blocking" is OFF.

4. Sitemap

A `sitemap.xml` file tells search engines every page on your site. It lives at `yourdomain.com/sitemap.xml`. Most website builders can generate one automatically — check your SEO settings. If not, there are free generators like [xml-sitemaps.com](https://www.xml-sitemaps.com).

5. JSON-LD Schema Markup

This is the most impactful thing you can add for AI visibility. It's a block of code in your page's HTML that describes your business in a format AI can read. We provide a copy-paste template in Chapter 7.

6. Open Graph Tags

These control how your site looks when shared on social media. They go in your HTML head section. At minimum, you need og:title, og:description, and og:image. Most website builders have fields for these in their SEO settings.

7. Geo Meta Tags

These tell search engines exactly where your business is located. Add these to your HTML head: `<meta name="geo.region" content="US-TX"> <meta name="geo.placename" content="Austin"> <meta name="geo.position" content="YOUR_LAT;YOUR_LNG">`

8. Canonical URL

This tells Google which version of your page is the "real" one (prevents duplicate content issues). Add this to your HTML head: `<link rel="canonical" href="https://yourdomain.com/page">`

9. Security Headers

HTTP security headers protect your site and signal trustworthiness to search engines. Your host may set these, or you can add them via your server config. Key ones: X-Frame-Options, X-Content-Type-Options, Referrer-Policy.

10. llms.txt

This is a new standard — a plain text file at `yourdomain.com/llms.txt` that gives AI a summary of your business. Think of it as a robots.txt but for AI understanding. Include: business name, what you do, where you are, services offered, contact info.

11. AI Search Presence

The ultimate test: does AI actually know about and recommend your business? Go to ChatGPT and ask "What are the best [your industry] in [your city]?" If you're not in the results, everything above is what you need to fix.

Google Business Profile Setup

If you do nothing else from this guide, do this. Your Google Business Profile (GBP) is the #1 factor for showing up in local search results AND it feeds into AI search.

Setup Checklist

- ✓ Go to business.google.com and claim or create your listing
- ✓ Verify your business (usually via postcard, phone, or email)
- ✓ Fill out EVERY field — name, address, phone, website, hours, description, services, attributes
- ✓ Add at least 10 high-quality photos (storefront, interior, team, your work)
- ✓ Write a description that includes your city and services naturally
- ✓ Add all your services as individual items with descriptions
- ✓ Select the right primary and secondary categories
- ✓ Turn on messaging and booking if applicable
- ✓ Post updates at least once a week (promotions, tips, photos)
- ✓ Respond to every review within 24 hours — good and bad

■ **TIP: To get more reviews: After every job, text your customer a direct link to your Google review page. You can get this link from your GBP dashboard under "Ask for reviews." Keep it simple: "Thanks for choosing us! If you have 30 seconds, a Google review means the world: [link]"**

Get Listed Everywhere That Matters

AI search engines pull data from multiple directories to build their knowledge of your business. Being listed (with consistent info) across all of these dramatically increases your visibility.

Foursquare

THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE. Powers 60-70% of ChatGPT local results. Claim at business.foursquare.com. Free.

Google Business Profile

You should already have this from Chapter 5. Powers Google AI Overview and feeds many other AI tools.

Yelp

Still matters for both traditional search and AI. Claim at biz.yelp.com. Free to claim, paid to advertise (you don't need to).

Apple Maps / Apple Business Connect

Powers Siri and Apple Maps recommendations. Claim at businessconnect.apple.com. Free.

Bing Places

Powers Microsoft Copilot (Bing AI). Claim at bingplaces.com. Free. You can import your Google listing.

Facebook Business Page

AI tools scrape Facebook for business info. Make sure your hours, services, and contact info are current.

■■ **WARNING: Your business Name, Address, and Phone (NAP) must be exactly identical on every listing. "123 Main St" on one and "123 Main Street" on another counts as inconsistent. Google and AI both penalize this.**

Schema Markup

Copy-Paste Templates

Schema markup is a block of code you add to your website that tells AI and search engines exactly what your business is. It produces 3x more AI citations than sites without it. Here's a template — replace the bracketed parts with your info.

Paste this in your HTML `<head>` section:

```
<script type="application/ld+json"> { "@context": "https://schema.org",
"@type": "[YourBusinessType]", "name": "[Your Business Name]",
"description": "[What you do, 1-2 sentences]", "url":
"https://[yourdomain.com]", "telephone": "+1[XXXXXXXXXX]", "address": {
"@type": "PostalAddress", "streetAddress": "[123 Main St]",
"addressLocality": "[City]", "addressRegion": "[TX]", "postalCode":
"[78701]", "addressCountry": "US" }, "geo": { "@type": "GeoCoordinates",
"latitude": "[YOUR_LAT]", "longitude": "[YOUR_LNG]" }, "priceRange": "$$",
"openingHoursSpecification": { "@type": "OpeningHoursSpecification",
"dayOfWeek": ["Monday","Tuesday", "Wednesday","Thursday","Friday"], "opens":
"08:00", "closes": "17:00" } } </script>
```

Common `@type` values:

Your Business	Use This @type
Plumber	Plumber
HVAC	HVACBusiness
Electrician	Electrician
Tattoo Shop	TattooParlor
Barber	BarberShop
Salon	BeautySalon
Restaurant	Restaurant
Auto Repair	AutoRepair

Fence/Gate

HomeAndConstructionBusiness

General

LocalBusiness

■ **TIP: Find your latitude and longitude: Go to Google Maps, right-click your business location, and click the coordinates that appear. They'll copy to your clipboard.**

Let the AI Bots In

This is the #1 invisible killer of AI visibility. Your website might be blocking AI search crawlers without you knowing it. Here's how to check and fix it.

Step 1: Check Your robots.txt

Open your browser and go to: yourdomain.com/robots.txt

If you see "Disallow: /" under any AI bot names (GPTBot, ClaudeBot, PerplexityBot, ChatGPT-User), that bot is blocked from your entire site.

Step 2: Fix It

Your robots.txt should include these lines:

```
User-agent: GPTBot Allow: / User-agent: ChatGPT-User Allow: / User-agent:
ClaudeBot Allow: / User-agent: anthropic-ai Allow: / User-agent:
PerplexityBot Allow: / User-agent: Googlebot Allow: / User-agent: Bingbot
Allow: /
```

Step 3: Check Cloudflare / Host Settings

If you use Cloudflare (many hosts use it behind the scenes): go to your Cloudflare dashboard, then Security > Bots. Make sure "AI Scrapers and Crawlers" is set to ALLOW, not block. Some hosts like SiteGround and WP Engine also have bot protection that can block AI crawlers.

Step 4: Create an llms.txt

Create a plain text file called llms.txt and put it at yourdomain.com/llms.txt. This gives AI a quick summary of your business. Here's a template:

```
# [Your Business Name] ## About [Your business name] is a [type of business]
located in [City, State]. We specialize in [your main services]. ## Services
```

- [Service 1] - [Service 2] - [Service 3] ## Service Area [City 1], [City 2], [City 3], and surrounding areas. ## Contact - Phone: [your number] - Website: [your URL] - Address: [your address]

Free Tools to Track Your Progress

Google Search Console

search.google.com/search-console

Free tool from Google that shows you exactly how your site performs in search. See what keywords you rank for, what pages get clicks, and any errors Google finds.

PageSpeed Insights

pagespeed.web.dev

Test your site speed on mobile and desktop. Aim for green scores (90+). This directly affects your Google ranking.

Schema Validator

validator.schema.org

Paste your website URL and it'll show you if your schema markup is working correctly. Fix any errors it finds.

BizBox Free Audit

bizinabox.one/audit

Our free 11-point audit tool. Enter any URL and get an instant score with specific fixes for each failed check. Includes AI search presence test.

ChatGPT (for testing)

chatgpt.com

The real test. Ask ChatGPT "What are the best [your industry] in [your city]?" and see if you show up. Try different phrasings. This is what your customers are doing.

Google Business Profile Dashboard

business.google.com

Check your GBP performance — how many people found you, what they searched, how many called. Review and respond to reviews here.

When to DIY vs. Hire Help

Be honest with yourself about what you'll actually do versus what will sit on your to-do list for six months.

You can probably DIY:

- ✓ Claiming and filling out your Google Business Profile
- ✓ Claiming Yelp, Apple Maps, Bing Places, Foursquare listings
- ✓ Asking customers for reviews
- ✓ Posting weekly updates to your GBP
- ✓ Writing better page titles and descriptions
- ✓ Creating an llms.txt file (it's just a text file)

You might need help with:

- ✗ Adding schema markup to your website (requires editing HTML)
- ✗ Fixing robots.txt and server configuration
- ✗ Optimizing site speed and mobile performance
- ✗ Setting up security headers
- ✗ Building or rebuilding a website that's properly structured for SEO and GEO
- ✗ Ongoing monitoring and adjustment as algorithms change

The stuff in the "need help" column is what we do. If you want someone to handle the whole thing — website, AI agents, SEO, GEO, the works — that's literally our business.

Want us to handle it?

Business in a Box builds the whole stack — website, AI voice agent, chat widget, SEO, GEO — and gets you to 11/11. No contracts. You own everything.

bizinabox.one · (512) 866-9042

We answer 24/7 — it's an AI agent. Give it a try.

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