BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Google Business Profile

Getting your business found on Google Search and Maps — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for local business owners

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

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For Google Search & Google Maps · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to the free listing that shows your business on Google Search and Google Maps: your hours, your phone number, your photos and your reviews. Read it in any order and at your own pace. Each chapter explains what a feature actually does *for your business*, then gives slow, step-by-step directions. Google moves its buttons around now and then, so when a label on your screen doesn't match exactly, look for the closest word — the idea stays the same.

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PART 1

Getting Started

What a Google Business Profile is, what it costs (nothing), what you'll need before you begin, and the handful of words Google uses. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If you run a business — a hair salon, a hardware store, a lawn service, a bakery, a one-person repair shop out of your garage — there's a good chance that the very first thing a new customer sees about you isn't your sign or your website. It's the little box that pops up on Google when they search for you, or the pin on Google Maps. That box is your **Google Business Profile**.

I'm Bill. I've spent more than 30 years working with technology, and these days I help people here in Portage County feel at home with theirs — including plenty of folks who are terrific at their trade and would rather not spend their evenings fighting with a computer. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it sitting across the counter from you: patiently, in plain English, and without trying to sell you anything.

What this guide will do for you

- Help you find out whether Google already has a listing for your business — it often does — and take charge of it.
- Walk you through **verification**, the step where Google confirms you really run the business.
- Get your hours, phone number, holiday closings and photos right, so customers don't show up to a locked door.
- Show you how to ask for reviews the honest way, how to reply to them, and what to do about a review that breaks the rules.
- Explain who should have access to your profile, and how to add a family member or employee *without* handing over your password.
- Point out the scams aimed squarely at small business owners — including phone calls from people pretending to be Google.

The big promise: you can't break it

Almost everything you do to a Business Profile can be changed again later. Typed the wrong closing time? Fix it. Picked a photo you don't love? Remove it. The only steps that are hard to undo — deleting a profile, marking a business permanently closed, or giving someone ownership — I'll flag clearly, every time, so you never do them by accident.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

A complete, accurate profile means fewer wasted trips for your customers, fewer "are you open?" phone calls for you, and a better first impression on the people deciding between you and the shop down the road. And it costs nothing but a little of your time.

And I'm only a phone call away

If anything in this guide leaves you unsure, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. There's no such thing as a silly question. Most business owners I meet are experts at their own work and simply never had a reason to learn this part. That's what I'm here for.

Let's start with the simplest question: what exactly *is* a Business Profile?

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What a Business Profile Is (and Isn't)

When someone searches Google for "plumber near me" or for your shop's name, a panel often appears with a name, a star rating, hours, a phone number, a **Call** button, **Directions**, photos and reviews. On Google Maps, the same information appears when someone taps your pin. That information is your **Business Profile**. Google used to call it **Google My Business**; you'll still hear that older name, and it means the same thing.

What it is

- A **free listing** on Google Search and Google Maps.
- Information you, as the owner, can control: name, category, address or service area, phone, website, hours, photos, a description, products and services.
- A place where customers leave **reviews**, and where you can reply.
- A small report card, called **Performance**, showing how many people found you and called, asked for directions or visited your website.

What it isn't

- **It isn't advertising.** You can't pay Google to move your free profile higher. Google's ads are a separate, paid product, and you never need them to have a profile.
- **It isn't a website.** It works alongside one, and it can link to one, but many small businesses do just fine with only a profile.
- **It isn't fully yours.** Customers can suggest edits and post photos and reviews. Google decides what shows. Your job is to keep your part accurate and respond well to the rest.

GOOD TO KNOW

Google may have made one for you already

Google builds listings from many sources, so a profile can exist for your business even if you never set one up. That's normal. Chapter 5 shows you how to find it and claim it, instead of making a second one.

SCAM ALERT

"Your Google listing will be removed" — no, it won't

A Business Profile is free. If someone calls saying your listing is about to be deleted or suspended unless you pay to "verify" it, hang up. Chapter 24 covers these calls in detail.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing what the profile is — and isn't — protects you from paying for things you don't need and lets you spend your time on the parts that actually bring in customers: accurate hours, good photos and honest reviews.

CHAPTER 3

What You'll Need Before You Start

Getting set up goes much faster with a few things gathered first. Sit down with a cup of coffee and this checklist. It's fine to do this over two or three sittings.

1. A Google Account you'll keep

Your profile is managed from a **Google Account** — the same kind of account used for Gmail. You can use an account you already have, or create one just for the business. Either way, it should be an account *you* control and will still have in ten years — not one set up by a nephew, a former employee or a web designer you no longer work with.

> TIP
>
> **Turn on 2-Step Verification**
>
> Because this account controls how the world finds your business, protect it with **2-Step Verification**, which asks for a code or a tap on your phone when someone signs in from a new device. Our *Your Google Account* manual walks through turning it on and setting up recovery options.

2. The basics, written down exactly

- Your business name **exactly as it appears on your sign, cards and paperwork**.
- Your street address — or, if customers never come to you, the towns or areas you serve.
- The phone number customers should call, and your website address if you have one.
- Your regular hours, day by day, and the holidays you usually close.
- A sentence or two about what you do, in plain words.

3. A phone and a few good photos

A smartphone helps twice: Google may ask you to record a short **verification video** (Chapter 7), and your phone's camera is perfectly good for profile photos (Chapter 13). Before you start, it's worth taking pictures of your storefront, your sign, the inside of the shop, and a few examples of your work.

4. Proof that you run the business

Depending on the verification method Google offers, you may need to show things like your business sign, tools or equipment, the inside of the business, or paperwork with the business name on it. Keep a utility bill or business license nearby; you may not need it, but it's handy if you do.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Ten minutes of gathering now saves an hour of hunting later — and making sure the account belongs to you means you never get locked out of your own listing.

CHAPTER 4

Words You'll See

Google uses a handful of words over and over. Here they are in plain English. You don't need to memorize them; come back here whenever one trips you up.

Word	What it means
Business Profile	Your free listing on Google Search and Maps. Formerly called Google My Business.
Claim	Telling Google "this business is mine" so you can manage its profile.
Verify / verified	Google's check that you really run the business. Many tools only work after verification.
Storefront business	Customers come to you at a public address — a shop, office or restaurant.
Service-area business	You go to customers — a plumber, a cleaner, a mobile groomer. Your address is hidden and only your service area shows.
Hybrid business	Both: customers can visit, and you also travel to them.
Category	The kind of business you are, chosen from Google's list — for example, "Hair salon" or "Plumber."
Primary owner	The one person with full control, including the power to hand over ownership.
Owner / manager	Extra people you allow to help. Owners can add or remove people; managers can't.
Special hours	Temporary changes to your hours, such as holidays.
Performance	Google's report of how people found you and what they did next.
Suspended	Google has restricted the profile, usually over a guideline problem. There's an appeal process.

GOOD TO KNOW

Storefront, service-area or hybrid?

This one matters. Google's rule is that if customers don't come to your address, your address must be hidden and only your service area shows. If you work from home and visit customers, you're a service-area business. Chapter 6 shows how to set it.

PART 2

Claiming & Verifying

Finding the listing Google may already have, creating one if it doesn't, proving to Google that you run the business, and what to do when someone else got there first.

CHAPTER 5

Is There Already a Profile for Your Business?

Before you create anything, look. Google often builds a basic listing from public information, and a previous owner, an employee or a marketing company may have claimed one years ago. Creating a second listing for the same place causes confusion — and Google's guidelines say not to create more than one profile for each location.

Search for yourself

1. On your phone, open the **Google Maps** app. Or, on a computer, go to **maps.google.com**.
2. Type your business name and your town — for example, **Smith Hardware Ravenna**.
3. If your business appears, tap or click it to open its listing.
4. Scroll down the listing. Look for a link such as **Own this business?** or **Claim this business**.
5. Also try searching your phone number and your street address. Old listings sometimes hide under a former name.

What you might find

What you see	What it means	What to do
No listing at all	Google has no profile yet	Create one — Chapter 6
A listing with an **Own this business?** or claim link	Nobody has verified it	Claim it, then verify — Chapter 7
A message that someone else may manage it	Someone already verified it	Find out who; request access if needed — Chapter 8
Two listings for the same place	A duplicate	Sort it out — Chapter 22

TIP

Ask around before you assume the worst

If the listing is already claimed, the "someone else" is very often a family member, a former employee, or the company that built your website. A friendly phone call to them is usually faster than any form.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Claiming the listing that already exists keeps whatever reviews and photos it has built up — instead of starting over from zero with a brand-new, empty profile.

CHAPTER 6

Creating a New Profile

If there's truly no listing for your business, you'll create one. Google will ask a series of short questions. Take them one at a time; you can change nearly every answer later.

Step by step

1. On a computer, go to **business.google.com** and sign in with the Google Account you chose in Chapter 3.
2. Choose the option to add or create a profile. Type your business name.
3. If Google suggests a matching business, stop and check — it may be yours already (Chapter 5). If not, choose the option to add your business.
4. Pick your **business category**. Start typing what you do and choose the closest match from the list Google shows. You can't invent your own category.
5. Answer whether customers can visit your location. If yes, enter your address. If no, you'll enter the areas you serve instead.
6. Add your phone number and website (or say you don't have one).
7. Google will then offer to verify you. You can do it now or come back to it — see Chapter 7.

Choosing a category

Your **main category** is one of the strongest signals Google uses to decide when to show you. Pick the one that describes what you mostly do — "Bakery," not "Store." You can add a few extra categories later for things you also do, but only if they truly fit. More isn't better; accurate is better.

Storefront, service-area or both

If customers come to you, show your address. If you go to customers and they never come to your address — common for contractors, cleaners and anyone who works from home — Google's rule is that you must **hide your address**, and your profile shows your service area instead. If you do both, show your address *and* add a service area.

HEADS UP

Working from home? Hide the address

If you run a service business from your house, don't show your home address on Google. Besides being against Google's rule for service-area businesses, it invites strangers to your door. Choose the service-area option and list the towns you serve, such as Kent, Ravenna, Streetsboro and Aurora.

TIP

Use the same details everywhere

Write your name, address and phone number exactly the same way on Google, your website, your Facebook page and your business cards. Consistency helps customers — and it helps Google trust that the information is right.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A correctly set-up profile puts you on the map — literally — for people searching nearby, and tells them in one glance what you do and how to reach you.

CHAPTER 7

Verifying Your Business

Verification is how Google confirms that you really run the business before it lets you manage the listing. Until you're verified, many tools — replying to reviews and seeing your Performance numbers, for example — stay locked.

Google picks the method, not you

Google's help center says the verification options you're offered depend on things like your type of business, its public information, your region and your hours — and that the methods are chosen automatically and **can't be changed**. Depending on your business, you might be offered one or more of these:

- **Video recording** — you record a short video showing your business. Google recommends this option when you're eligible.
- **Live video call** — you show your business to a Google support person over a video call. This isn't available to every business.
- **Phone call or text** — a code is sent to the business phone number.
- **Email** — a code is sent to an email address.
- **Postcard** — a code is mailed to your business address.

Recording a verification video

Google says video verification works for storefront, service-area and hybrid businesses. The video needs to show key information that proves you manage or represent the business. Before you press record, plan a short walk-through:

1. Start outside, if you have a storefront: show the street sign or a nearby landmark, then your building and your business sign.
2. Show your business name on something real — the sign, a vehicle, a uniform, or paperwork with the business name on it.
3. Show that you're open for business: the cash register or card reader, your tools, equipment or inventory.
4. Show that you're allowed to be there — unlocking the door, opening the back room or the work truck.
5. Keep it to one continuous video. Don't stop and start, and don't edit it.
6. Follow the on-screen prompts to upload it. Then wait for Google's review.

TIP

Keep faces and private papers out of it

You're proving the business is real, not who you are. There's no need to film customers, employees' faces, or papers showing account numbers. Hold the camera steady and move slowly.

If the video is rejected

Google's help page says that if your video isn't accepted, you'll see a **Review issues** notification on your profile. Select it and follow the on-screen instructions — usually that means recording a new video that shows the missing pieces more clearly.

HEADS UP

Be patient

Reviews of verification videos can take several days. Resist the urge to create a second profile or change your business name while you wait; changes like that can slow things down or trigger another review.

SCAM ALERT

Nobody needs to charge you to verify

Verification is done with Google, for free. Be very wary of anyone who calls offering to "verify" your listing for a fee, and **never** read a verification code to a caller. That code is the key to your listing.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once verified, you — and only you and the people you choose — can control what Google tells the world about your business.

CHAPTER 8

When Someone Else Already Owns It

Sometimes you search for your business and Google says someone else already manages it. Don't panic, and don't create a new listing. There's a proper way through this.

First: who could it be?

- A previous owner, if you bought the business.
- A partner, spouse, son or daughter who helped set things up years ago.
- A former employee or office manager.
- A web designer or marketing company you hired at some point.

If you can think of who it is, call them. They can add you as an owner in a couple of minutes (Chapter 21 shows how), and then make you the primary owner. That's by far the fastest route.

If you can't reach them: request ownership

1. Search for your business on Google Maps and open the listing.
2. Choose the option to claim it. When Google says someone else may manage this Business Profile, select **Request access**.
3. Fill out the form carefully, using your real name and business details, and submit it.
4. Keep the confirmation email Google sends. Its link lets you check on your request.
5. Wait. Google's help center says the current owner has **three days** to respond.
6. Check back using the link in the email. It will tell you what's happened and whether there's a next step for you.

GOOD TO KNOW

Being the owner in real life isn't enough by itself

Owning the business doesn't automatically make you the owner of its Google profile. Google needs you to request access or verify. That's a safety feature — it stops strangers from grabbing your listing just by saying it's theirs.

HEADS UP

Selling or buying a business?

Put the Google profile in the sale paperwork. The seller should transfer primary ownership to the buyer before closing. It's much easier to do while everyone is still talking to each other.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Getting control of the existing listing protects years of reviews and keeps a former employee or stranger from changing your hours or phone number.

PART 3

Getting Your Information Right

Where to make changes, and how to keep your name, phone, hours and holiday closings accurate — the details customers rely on most.

CHAPTER 9

Where You Manage Your Profile

Years ago there was a separate Google My Business app. That app was retired in 2022. Today you manage your profile right from **Google Search** and the **Google Maps** app, which is simpler once you know where to look.

From Google Search, on a computer or phone

1. Make sure you're signed in to the Google Account that manages your profile. (On a computer, your initial or picture shows at the top right of google.com.)
2. Search for your business name and town. Searching the words **my business** often works too.
3. Your profile appears with owner tools above it or beside it. Choose **Edit profile**.
4. Make your change, then choose **Save**. Save after each change.

From the Google Maps app

1. Open **Google Maps** on your phone and make sure you're signed in to the right account (tap your picture at the top right to check or switch).
2. Look for the **Business** tab or your profile's name. Tap it.
3. Choose **Edit profile**, then **Business information**, and make your changes.

> TIP
>
> **Signed in as the wrong account?**
>
> This is the number-one reason owners say "the edit button isn't there." If you have a personal Gmail and a business Gmail, check which one you're signed in to. Switch accounts, search again, and the owner tools should appear.

If you manage more than one location

If you have several shops or offices, the desktop dashboard at **business.google.com** lists them together, which is easier than searching for each one.

GOOD TO KNOW

Edits may be reviewed

Google sometimes checks changes before they show publicly — especially changes to your name, address or category. If an edit doesn't appear right away, give it a little time rather than making the same change again and again.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once you know the two front doors — Search and Maps — you can fix a wrong hour or add a holiday closing from your phone in under a minute, wherever you are.

CHAPTER 10

Your Name, Category, Phone and Website

These four details do most of the work. They decide whether Google shows you, and what a customer can do with one tap.

Your business name

Use your business's real name, exactly as it appears on your sign and paperwork. It's tempting to add extra words — "Smith Hardware Best Paint Store Ravenna" — but stuffing words into the name is against Google's guidelines and is one of the common reasons profiles get suspended (Chapter 23). If you want to tell people you sell paint, that belongs in your categories, products and description.

Your phone number

- Use a number that a real person answers, or that has a clear voicemail during business hours.
- If customers tap **Call** on your profile, this is the number their phone dials.
- If you change phone numbers, update Google the same day. An old number on Google is a lost customer.

Your website

If you have a website, add its address. If you don't, that's all right — your profile can stand on its own. Some owners link to their Facebook page instead. Whatever you use, click it yourself now and then to make sure it still works.

Your description, services and products

The **description** is a short paragraph in your own words. Say what you do, who you serve and where — plainly, the way you'd tell a neighbor. Then use the **services** or **products** sections, if your category offers them, to list the main things people come to you for. Skip the sales talk and the phone numbers; customers want facts.

TIP

A good description, in three sentences

What you do. Who you serve and where. What makes you worth calling. For example: "Family-owned small-engine repair in Ravenna. We fix mowers, snow blowers and chainsaws for homeowners across Portage County. Most repairs are ready within a week." (Use your own true details, of course.)

HEADS UP

Customers can suggest edits

Anyone can suggest a change to a business on Google Maps, and Google may accept it. Check your profile every month or so to make sure your phone, hours and address haven't been changed without you noticing.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Accurate basics mean the right customers find you, and the **Call** and **Website** buttons actually reach you.

CHAPTER 11

Hours, Holiday Hours and Closings

Nothing frustrates a customer faster than driving across town to find a dark window. Getting your hours right — and keeping holidays up to date — is one of the most valuable things you can do.

Setting your regular hours

1. Open your profile from Search or Maps (Chapter 9) and choose **Edit profile**.
2. Find **Hours**.
3. Choose **Open with main hours**.
4. For each day, enter your opening and closing times, or mark the day closed. If you close for lunch, add a second set of hours for that day.
5. Choose **Save**.

Special hours: holidays and one-off changes

Special hours are for temporary changes — Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, a family wedding, inventory day. Google's help center says you can use them when you adjust your hours or close for **up to six days in a row**.

1. In **Edit profile**, go to **Hours**, then **Special hours**.
2. Choose the date.
3. Enter the hours you'll be open that day, or mark it **Closed**.
4. Add more dates the same way, then choose **Save**.

> GOOD TO KNOW
>
> **Two rules worth knowing**
>
> First, special hours only show if your regular hours are set to **Open with main hours**. Second, Google may ask you to confirm your hours for official holidays even when they're the same as usual — confirming tells customers your hours are accurate.

TIP

Set the whole season in one sitting

In early November, sit down with a calendar and enter Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day all at once. The "Ways … Can Make Life Easier" section walks through it.

Closed longer than a few days?

For a longer closing — a renovation, a medical leave, a seasonal business that shuts down for the winter — Google offers a way to mark the business **temporarily closed**, which you can undo when you reopen. That's very different from **permanently closed**. Chapter 22 explains the difference, and why you should never choose "permanently" by mistake.

HEADS UP

Weather days

Closing early for a snowstorm? Add a special-hours entry for that day as soon as you decide. Many customers check Google before they head out on a bad-weather day.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Correct hours mean no angry calls, no wasted trips and no bad reviews that start with "Google said they were open."

CHAPTER 12

Keeping It Up to Date: A Monthly Habit

A profile isn't something you set up once and forget. Google can accept edits from the public, customers add photos, and your own business changes. A short check once a month keeps everything honest.

Your ten-minute monthly check

1. Search for your business and look at it the way a customer would. Is anything wrong or missing?
2. Check the phone number, address or service area, website link and hours.
3. Look for upcoming holidays and add special hours.
4. Read any new reviews and reply where it helps (Chapter 17).
5. Look at new photos customers have added. Report any that don't belong (Chapter 13).
6. Glance at your Performance numbers (Chapter 20).
7. Check that the people with access are still people who should have it (Chapter 21).

TIP

Put it on the calendar

Pick an easy date — the first Monday of the month — and set a repeating reminder on your phone. Habits beat good intentions.

When something changes in your business

If this happens	Do this
New phone number	Update Google the same day.
New hours	Change your main hours; don't use special hours for a permanent change.
Moving	Update your address. Google may ask you to verify again at the new location.
New service or product line	Add it to services or products, and consider a post (Chapter 14).
Employee who managed the profile leaves	Remove their access that week (Chapter 21).
Selling the business	Transfer primary ownership to the buyer (Chapter 21).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Ten minutes a month keeps your first impression accurate and catches problems — a wrong number, a fake review, an ex-employee's access — before they cost you customers.

PART 4

Photos & Posts

Showing people what your business looks like before they arrive, and sharing news, sales and events right on your profile.

CHAPTER 13

Photos and Videos That Help

People decide a lot from pictures. Is this the kind of place I want to walk into? Does their work look good? Is there parking? You don't need a professional photographer. A modern phone, good light and a little care are plenty.

What to photograph

- **The outside**, from the street, so people recognize the building when they pull up. Include the sign.
- **The entrance**, especially if it's tucked around the side or shares a lot with other businesses.
- **The inside**, tidy and well lit.
- **Your work** — finished jobs, products on the shelf, a plate of food, a freshly cut lawn.
- **Your team at work**, if they're comfortable with it. Always ask first.
- **Your logo**, as a clean, square image.

Google's size and file rules

Item	Google's guideline
Photo format	JPG or PNG
Photo file size	Between 10 KB and 5 MB
Photo size	720 x 720 pixels recommended; at least 250 x 250 pixels
Video length	Up to 30 seconds
Video file size	Up to 75 MB
Video quality	720p or higher

TIP

Your phone already meets these

Photos straight from a recent smartphone are well above the minimum size. If a photo is too large, email it to yourself and choose a smaller size, or use your phone's built-in editor to crop it.

Adding a photo

1. Take the photo in good daylight. Wipe the lens with a soft cloth first.
2. Open your profile from Search or Maps (Chapter 9).
3. Find the option to add photos — it may be labeled **Add photo** or appear under **Photos**.
4. Choose the photo from your phone or computer and upload it.
5. Google may take a little while to show it publicly.

Photos other people add

Customers can add their own photos to your profile. Most are helpful. Now and then one is blurry, off-topic, or shows something that has nothing to do with your business. You can report a photo that breaks Google's content rules by opening it and using the flag or report option. Google decides whether it comes down; an unflattering but honest photo usually stays.

HEADS UP

Don't post what isn't yours

Use photos you took or that you have permission to use. Pictures grabbed from a supplier's website or a stock photo site can mislead customers and may break copyright. Real photos of your real business are always better.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Good photos help a customer recognize your building, trust your work and feel comfortable walking in for the first time.

CHAPTER 14

Posts: Sharing News, Offers and Events

A **post** is a short announcement that appears on your profile — a bit like a note on the bulletin board by your door. It's a handy way to tell people what's new without building a website.

The kinds of posts

Post type	Use it for
Update	General news: new hours, a new service, a photo of a recent job, a thank-you to the community.
Offer	A sale or discount, with start and end dates and any coupon code or terms.
Event	Something happening on a certain date — an open house, a class, a sidewalk sale.

Writing a post

1. Open your profile from Search or Maps and look for **Add update** or **Create post**.
2. Choose the type of post.
3. Add a photo if you can — posts with a picture catch the eye.
4. Write a few plain sentences. Say what it is, when, and what the customer should do.
5. Add a button if Google offers one — for example, **Call now** or **Learn more**.
6. Read it over once, then publish.

TIP

Ideas when you're stuck

Seasonal reminders ("Time to tune up the snow blower"), a before-and-after photo, a new product on the shelf, holiday hours, a welcome to a new employee, a thank-you after a community event.

GOOD TO KNOW

Posts don't all last forever

Some kinds of posts stop showing prominently after a while, and offers and events are tied to their dates. Google's help center has the current rules; the simple habit is to post something fresh every few weeks.

HEADS UP

Keep it honest and simple

Posts have to follow Google's content policies, and a post that's misleading or off-topic can be rejected. Stick to plain facts and real offers you'll honor.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A recent post shows customers you're open, active and paying attention — and it gives them a reason to call you today.

PART 5

Reviews

Why reviews matter, how to ask for them honestly, the rules that can get a business in real trouble, how to reply, and what to do about a review that breaks the rules.

CHAPTER 15

Asking Customers for Reviews

For many people, the star rating and the most recent reviews are the deciding factor between two businesses. The good news: most happy customers are glad to leave a review. They just need to be asked, and it needs to be easy.

Get your review link or QR code

Google gives every verified business a link that opens straight to the review form, and a **QR code** — the square barcode people point their phone camera at. Google's help center says the QR code can only be made on a **computer** web browser, not on a phone.

1. On a computer, sign in and open your profile from Google Search (Chapter 9).
2. Choose **Read reviews**.
3. Choose **Get more reviews** (it has a share icon).
4. To copy the link, choose **Copy**. Paste it into an email or text message.
5. To save the QR code, right-click the code and choose **Save image as…**. Save it somewhere you'll find it, such as your Desktop.

Where to use it

- In thank-you emails and texts after a job.
- On printed receipts or invoices.
- On a small sign by the register, with the QR code.
- On the back of your business card.

How to ask, in plain words

Ask every customer the same way, right after the job's done or the purchase is made: "If you were happy with us, would you mind leaving a review on Google? Here's a card with the link." That's it. No pressure, no promises, no reward.

TIP

Ask everyone, not just the happy ones

Asking every customer the same way is both the fair thing and the safe thing. Trying to steer only happy customers to Google, and unhappy ones somewhere private, can run afoul of the rules in the next chapter.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A steady trickle of honest, recent reviews tells new customers what it's really like to work with you — in other people's words, which carry more weight than any ad.

CHAPTER 16

The Rules: No Paying, No Fakes, No Pressure

This chapter could save your business real money. The rules around reviews have tightened, and the penalties for breaking them are no longer just a slap on the wrist. Here's what you need to know, in plain English.

Google's rules

Google's policy for reviews says businesses may **not** offer incentives — payment, discounts, free goods or services — in exchange for a review, or in exchange for changing or removing a negative review. Asking for honest reviews is allowed; buying them, in any form, is not.

- No "10% off your next visit if you leave us five stars."
- No "free oil change for a review" — even if you don't ask for five stars.
- No offering a refund or discount to get someone to take down a bad review.
- No writing reviews of your own business, and no asking employees or family to pose as customers.

Google says that if a profile is repeatedly found breaking its fake-engagement rules, it may place restrictions on the profile, in addition to removing the fake reviews.

The federal rule

The **Federal Trade Commission** (FTC) — the government agency that protects consumers — has a rule banning fake reviews and testimonials. It took effect on **October 21, 2024**. Among other things, it prohibits:

- Fake reviews, including ones written by AI, that pretend to come from real customers.
- Buying positive or negative reviews.
- Reviews from owners, employees or relatives that don't clearly disclose the connection, in certain situations.
- Using threats — including groundless legal threats — or intimidation to stop people from posting negative reviews or to get them removed.
- Buying or selling fake followers or views.

The FTC can seek civil penalties from businesses that knowingly break the rule — tens of thousands of dollars per violation.

HEADS UP

"Review services" that promise lots of five-star reviews

If a company offers to deliver a batch of five-star reviews for a fee, it is selling fake reviews. Google can remove them and restrict your profile, and the FTC rule puts the risk on *your* business. Walk away.

GOOD TO KNOW

This isn't legal advice

I'm a technology helper, not a lawyer. If you have a question about a specific promotion or about the FTC rule, ask your attorney or check the FTC's own business guidance.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Following the rules protects the reviews you've honestly earned — and keeps your business out of a fight with Google or the federal government.

CHAPTER 17

Replying to Reviews

When you reply to a review, you're not really talking to the reviewer. You're talking to every future customer who reads it. A calm, kind reply to a complaint can win more trust than a dozen five-star reviews.

Before you can reply

Your business has to be **verified** before you can reply to reviews. Replies are public — anyone who reads the review will see your answer.

How to reply

1. Open your profile from Search or Maps (Chapter 9).
2. Choose **Read reviews** or **Reviews**.
3. Find the review and choose **Reply**.
4. Write your reply. Read it out loud once — does it sound like you on a good day?
5. Post it. You can edit or delete your reply later from the same place if you need to.

Google's own advice

Google's help center suggests replying when you have something new or useful to add, keeping replies short and helpful, responding promptly, and signing your reply with your name or initials. You don't have to publicly thank every single reviewer.

Replying to a good review

Keep it short and personal. Thank them and mention something specific if you can. For example: "Thank you, Mary! We're glad the new storm door is keeping the draft out. — Tom"

Replying to a bad review

1. Wait until you've cooled off. A few hours — or a night's sleep — is fine.
2. Thank them for the feedback and say you're sorry about their experience. You're not admitting fault; you're being decent.
3. If there's a simple fact that helps, state it calmly, without arguing.
4. Invite them to contact you directly to make it right, with a phone number or email.

5. Don't mention their private details, their bill, or anything they told you in confidence.
6. Sign it.

For example: "I'm sorry your visit didn't go as you hoped, and thank you for telling us. We'd like the chance to make it right — please call me at the shop and ask for Linda. — Linda, owner"

HEADS UP

Never argue, never offer a deal for a change

A heated reply looks worse than the review itself. And remember Chapter 16: offering a refund or discount *in exchange for* changing or removing a review breaks Google's rules. Make things right because it's right — and let the customer decide on their own whether to update what they wrote.

TIP

Protect privacy, especially in health and personal services

If you're a dentist, counselor, salon or any business where privacy matters, never confirm in a reply that the reviewer was your client or mention what you did for them. A general, kind reply and an invitation to call is the safe route.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Thoughtful replies show future customers that a real, caring person runs the business — and that problems get fixed.

CHAPTER 18

Reporting a Review That Breaks the Rules

Sooner or later, most businesses get a review that stings. Here's the honest truth: Google will not remove a review just because it's negative, unfair, or you disagree with it. It removes reviews that break its content policies.

What can be reported

- Spam and fake reviews — for example, a burst of reviews from people who were never customers.
- Reviews about a different business, or that are off-topic.
- Hate speech, harassment, threats or offensive content.
- Conflicts of interest — a competitor or former employee reviewing you.
- Personal information, such as someone's phone number or home address.

Reporting and checking on a review

You can flag a review from your profile, and Google's **Reviews Management Tool** lets you check the status of reviews you've reported. If Google decides a review you reported doesn't qualify for removal, the tool may offer a one-time **appeal**:

1. Open the Reviews Management Tool from Google Business Profile Help and choose your business.
2. Check the status of the review you reported.
3. If it's eligible, choose to appeal. You can appeal up to 10 eligible reviews at a time.
4. Fill in the form, explaining clearly which policy the review breaks.
5. Submit it. Google emails you the decision. The review is removed only if it breaks policy.

TIP

Make your report count

Be specific and calm. "This person was never a customer — we have no record of anyone by that name, and the review describes a service we don't offer" is far more useful than "This review is a lie."

When someone demands money to stop bad reviews

A growing scam: a stranger posts a string of one-star reviews, then messages the business demanding payment to stop or remove them. Google has a dedicated **merchant extortion report form** for exactly this. Its help center says to report promptly and include as much detail as you can.

1. Do not pay, and do not reply to the demand.
2. Take screenshots of the messages, the demands and the reviews. Note the dates and times.
3. In Google Business Profile Help, find the article about reporting negative review extortion and open the extortion report form.
4. Fill it in, attach your screenshots, and submit it.

SCAM ALERT

Paying never makes it stop

Anyone extorting you with fake reviews will come back for more once they know you'll pay. Report it to Google, keep your evidence, and consider reporting it to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at ic3.gov.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing what Google will and won't remove saves you hours of frustration, and knowing about the extortion form means you have a real answer when someone tries to blackmail your business.

PART 6

Calls, Messages & Your Numbers

How customers reach you from your profile today, what changed when Google retired chat, and how to read the Performance report without getting lost in it.

CHAPTER 19

How Customers Contact You Now

If you set up a profile a few years ago, you may remember a **Chat** button that let customers message you through Google, and a **call history** list. Both are gone. Here's what changed and what still works.

What Google retired

- **Chat (messaging)** — customers could no longer start new chats from mid-July 2024, and Google turned the feature off on **July 31, 2024**.
- **Call history** — the list of calls made from your profile ended at the same time.
- Google let businesses download their old chats and call history through **Google Takeout** until August 30, 2024. That window has closed.

What still works

Feature	What it does
Call button	Dials the phone number on your profile. This is the big one.
Website button	Opens the website you listed.
Directions	Gives turn-by-turn directions to a storefront.
Reviews	Customers can still review you, and you can reply (Chapter 17).
Your own channels	Your website's contact form, email and social media pages, if you list them.

TIP

Make the phone the easy choice

With chat gone, the **Call** button is how most customers will reach you from Google. Make sure the number is right, voicemail is set up, and your greeting says your business name and hours.

HEADS UP

Someone says they "messaged you on Google"?

Business chat through your Google profile no longer exists. If a customer insists they sent a message, they may have used a different app, or a contact form on another site. And be careful with any message claiming to be "from Google" about your profile — see Chapter 24.

Questions customers ask

Google used to have a public **Questions & answers** section on profiles. Google has been phasing it out in favor of an AI feature in Google Maps that answers people's questions using your profile information, your reviews and your website. You don't manage the AI's answers directly — the best thing you can do is keep your hours, services, description and website complete and correct, so it has good information to draw from.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing which doors are open — and which closed — means you stop looking for messages that will never come and focus on the phone number and information customers really use.

CHAPTER 20

Reading Your Performance Numbers

Google gives verified businesses a simple report called **Performance**. It shows how people found your profile and what they did next. You don't need to study it every day — a monthly look is plenty — but it can answer useful questions, like whether your new photos or holiday hours made a difference.

Finding it

1. Open your profile from Google Search while signed in (Chapter 9).
2. Choose **Performance**.
3. Pick a date range at the top — the past month is a good place to start.

What the numbers mean

Number	What it tells you
Views / interactions	How many people saw your profile on Search and Maps, and how many acted on it.
Searches	The words people typed when your profile showed up. This number is updated at the start of each month.
Calls	How many times someone tapped the **Call** button on your profile.
Directions	How many people asked for directions to your business.
Website clicks	How many people clicked your website link.

GOOD TO KNOW

The calls number is a floor, not a total

Google only counts taps on the **Call** button. If someone copies your number and dials it themselves, or hangs up before it rings, the count won't match the calls you actually got. Use it to see trends, not as an exact tally.

Questions the numbers can answer

- Are more people finding me this month than last? (Look at views and searches.)
- Which words do people use to find me? If they search for a service you offer but don't list, add it (Chapter 10).

- Did my holiday hours or new photos change anything? Compare the month before and after.
- Are people calling or clicking my website more? That tells you which to keep up to date first.

TIP

Write it down

Once a month, jot three numbers in a notebook: views, calls and website clicks. After a year you'll see your busy and slow seasons at a glance, without any spreadsheets.

HEADS UP

Numbers only appear after verification

If you don't see a Performance section at all, your profile probably isn't verified yet. Go back to Chapter 7.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A few minutes with your numbers tells you whether your profile is working for you — and where a small change could bring in more calls.

PART 7

People, Problems & Protection

Who should have access to your profile, how to handle duplicates and closings, what to do if Google suspends your profile, and the scams aimed at business owners.

CHAPTER 21

Owners and Managers: Sharing Access Safely

Maybe your daughter handles the online side, or your office manager posts the holiday hours. The wrong way to share is to give them your Google password. The right way is to add them as an **owner** or **manager** using their own Google Account. Each person signs in as themselves, and you can remove them any time.

The three roles

Role	Can edit info, photos, posts & reply to reviews	Can add or remove people	Can hand over primary ownership
Primary owner (only one)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Owner	Yes	Yes	No
Manager	Yes	No	No

Managers also can't delete the profile. A profile can have several owners, but only one **primary owner**.

Adding someone

1. Open your profile from Search or Maps while signed in as an owner (Chapter 9).
2. Choose **More** (or the three-dot menu), then **Business Profile settings**, then **People and access**.
3. Choose **Add**.
4. Type the person's email address — the one tied to *their* Google Account.
5. Choose their role: **Manager** for most helpers, **Owner** only for someone you'd trust with the whole business.
6. Choose **Invite**. They'll get an email and must accept it.

> **TIP**
>
> **When in doubt, choose Manager**
>
> A manager can do nearly all the day-to-day work — hours, photos, posts and review replies — but can't lock you out or remove other people. That's the right level for most employees, family helpers and outside marketing help.

Removing someone

Go back to **People and access**, choose the person, and remove them. Do this the same week an employee leaves or you stop working with a marketing company. It's not personal — it's simply good housekeeping.

Handing over primary ownership

When you sell the business or retire and pass it to a son or daughter, the primary owner can make another owner the new primary owner from **People and access**. Google's help center notes a few things to know:

- The person must already be an owner or manager on the profile.
- Someone newly added has a **7-day waiting period** before they can be made primary owner, delete the profile, or remove other people.
- The transfer takes effect right away, without the new owner confirming it.
- A primary owner can't remove themselves until they've transferred primary ownership to someone else.

HEADS UP

This one is hard to undo

Once you make someone else the primary owner, they control the profile — including whether you stay on it. Double-check the name before you confirm, and only do it when you mean it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Proper access lets family and staff help without ever knowing your password — and lets you take that help away cleanly when circumstances change.

CHAPTER 22

Duplicates, Moves and Closings

Over the years, a business can end up with two listings, move across town, or close. Each needs a slightly different approach, and a couple of the choices are hard to take back.

Two listings for the same business

Duplicates confuse customers and split your reviews in two. What to do depends on who controls the extra listing:

- **Both are in your account.** Decide which one to keep — usually the one with more reviews. Ask Google Business Profile support for help before removing anything, especially if both have reviews.
- **The extra one isn't yours.** Open it on Google Maps, choose **Suggest an edit**, and report it as a duplicate of another place. Google reviews these reports, which can take some time.

> HEADS UP
>
> **Don't use "permanently closed" to get rid of a duplicate**
>
> Marking a real listing permanently closed tells customers you've gone out of business — and it's much harder to reverse than it looks. Report the duplicate or contact Google support instead.

Moving to a new location

1. Update your address on your existing profile — don't create a new one. That keeps your reviews.
2. Expect that Google may ask you to verify again at the new address.
3. Add a post (Chapter 14) announcing the move, with the new address and the date.
4. Update the address on your website, Facebook page and anywhere else it appears.

Temporarily closed or permanently closed?

Choice	When to use it
Temporarily closed	For a renovation, illness, or seasonal break. Easy to switch back when you reopen.
Permanently closed	Only when the business has truly closed for good. The listing stays visible with a "Permanently closed" label, and it's hard to undo.

TIP

Closing for good, or retiring?

If you're retiring and someone is taking over the business, transfer the profile to them instead of closing it (Chapter 21). If the business is truly ending, mark it permanently closed so customers aren't left calling a disconnected number.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Handling moves and duplicates correctly keeps your reviews together and keeps customers from driving to an empty building.

CHAPTER 23

If Your Profile Is Suspended

Occasionally Google **suspends** or disables a profile, usually because it thinks something breaks its guidelines — keywords stuffed into the business name, a home address shown for a business that should hide it, a virtual office that customers can't really visit, or a burst of suspicious reviews. Sometimes it's simply a mistake. Either way, there's a process.

What to do

1. Don't panic, and **don't create a new profile**. That usually makes matters worse.
2. Read Google's message carefully. Then compare your profile with the guidelines: Is the name exactly your real-world name? Is the address correct and handled properly for your type of business? Are the categories accurate?
3. Gather proof that the business is real and that you run it — a business license, a utility bill with the business name and address, photos of your sign and storefront.
4. Go to Google Business Profile Help and find the article on fixing suspended or disabled profiles. Use the appeals tool it links to.
5. Submit your appeal with your proof. Have everything ready before you start.
6. Check the appeals tool for the status. Google says most requests are handled within a few days.

Appeal statuses you may see

Status	What it means
Eligible for appeal	You can submit an appeal.
Submitted	Google has it and is reviewing.
Approved	Your profile is restored.
Not approved	Google kept the restriction. Google may be able to do an additional review.
Can't be appealed	This decision isn't open to appeal.

SCAM ALERT

Beware "reinstatement experts" who cold-call

A suspension is stressful, and scammers know it. Anyone who calls out of the blue promising to get your profile restored for a fee — or claiming to have "a contact inside Google" — is not someone to trust. The appeal is free and you can do it yourself.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the proper appeal route gets you back online faster and keeps you from making a temporary problem permanent.

CHAPTER 24

Scams Aimed at Business Owners

Small business owners get more than their share of scam calls and emails, and many of them use Google's name. The single most useful thing to remember: **a Google Business Profile is free**, and anyone demanding money to create, verify, keep or fix it is not Google.

The calls and messages to watch for

What they say	What's really going on
"Your listing will be deleted"	A robocall or caller warns your profile is about to be suspended or removed unless you act now. Hang up.
"Pay to verify"	Someone offers to verify or "activate" your listing for a fee. Verification is free and done directly with Google.
"Read me the code"	A caller asks for a code that was just texted or emailed to you. That code is the key to your account or listing. Never share it.
"Guaranteed first place on Google"	Nobody can guarantee your spot on Google. Free profiles can't be bought to the top.
"Remove bad reviews for a fee"	Only Google removes reviews, and only for policy violations (Chapter 18).
Review extortion	A stranger posts fake one-star reviews and demands payment to stop. Report it with Google's extortion form (Chapter 18).
Fake "Google" invoices	An email or letter billing you for your listing. There's nothing to pay.

SCAM ALERT

The one rule that stops almost all of them

If someone contacts *you* about your Google listing and the conversation turns to money, passwords or codes, stop. Hang up or don't reply. Then go to your profile yourself, by searching for your business while signed in, and see whether anything is actually wrong. It almost never is.

Protect your account

- Turn on 2-Step Verification on the Google Account that owns the profile.
- Use a strong, unique password — not the one you use for everything else.
- Keep the list of owners and managers short, and remove people who no longer need access.

- Be wary of emails that look like Google asking you to "sign in to fix a problem." Go to the profile yourself instead of clicking the link.

If you already paid or shared something

1. If you gave out a code or password, change your Google password right away and check **People and access** for anyone you don't recognize. Remove them.
2. If you paid by card, call the number on the back of the card and report the charge as fraud.
3. Report the scam to the FTC at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**.
4. Call me if you'd like a hand checking your account and profile for anything that was changed.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A few minutes learning these patterns can save you hundreds of dollars — and the headache of getting back control of a listing you were tricked into handing over.

PART 8

When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

An honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary to keep by the register.

CHAPTER 25

When to Call Bill

Most of what's in this guide you can do yourself, a little at a time. But part of being helpful is being honest about when a hand saves you time and worry. Here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **Getting set up from scratch** — finding any existing listing, claiming it, picking the right category, and getting verification started.
- **A verification video** — planning and recording it with you so it shows what Google needs to see.
- **Sorting out who owns the profile** — tracking down an old login, requesting access, or cleaning up a list of owners and managers.
- **Adding a family member or employee** as a manager, the right way.
- **A review link and QR code** printed and ready for your counter, cards and invoices.
- **A suspicious call or message** about your listing — I'll help you check whether anything is really wrong.
- **Securing the Google Account** behind your profile with 2-Step Verification and recovery options.

What I don't do

I'm a technology helper, not a marketing agency. I don't sell advertising, write fake reviews, or promise you a top spot on Google — nobody honestly can. I also don't give legal advice; for questions about the FTC rule or a specific promotion, talk with your attorney.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace, explain what I'm doing in plain words, and never talk down to anyone. I'll tell you honestly when something isn't worth your money. I've been doing this kind of work for more than 30 years, and I serve Portage County, Ohio, in person — at your home or your shop — and folks farther away by remote help.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042** or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. This guide is yours to keep for free; if you'd like a hand, I'm only a phone call away.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may meet Sophie first

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you might be greeted by **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and help you book a time. A real person — me — does the actual help.

Thank you for taking the time to look after this part of your business. Your customers are out there searching right now — let's make sure they find you.

— Bill

CHAPTER 26

Your Google Business Profile Cheat-Sheet

Keep just this page by the register or with your business paperwork. The whole guide, boiled down.

The essentials

Topic	Remember
What it costs	Nothing. A Business Profile is free. Anyone charging to verify it is not Google.
Where to edit	Sign in, search your business name (or **my business**) on Google, choose **Edit profile**. Or use the Google Maps app.
Verification	Google picks the method. Video is recommended when offered. Never read a code to a caller.
Name	Your real-world name only. No extra keywords.
Working from home?	Hide your address and list your service area.
Holidays	Edit profile, Hours, Special hours. Main hours must be set to Open with main hours.
Photos	JPG or PNG, 10 KB to 5 MB, about 720 x 720 pixels.
Reviews	Ask everyone, the same way. No discounts, gifts or payment for reviews.
Bad review	Cool off, reply kindly, invite them to call. Report only rule-breakers.
Extortion	Don't pay. Screenshot everything. Use Google's extortion report form.
Helpers	Add them as Managers under People and access. Never share your password.
Chat	Retired in July 2024. The Call button is your main contact.

Write it down once

Keep handy	
Google Account that owns the profile	_____
Where the password is kept	_____
Primary owner	_____
Other owners & managers	_____
Date verified	_____
My review link (or where I saved the QR code)	_____
Monthly check-up day	_____

When something's wrong, in order

1. Breathe. Almost nothing on a Business Profile is permanent.
2. Make sure you're signed in to the right Google Account.
3. Search your business name and look at the profile as a customer would.
4. Wrong info? Choose **Edit profile** and fix it.
5. A call or message about your listing asking for money or a code? Hang up — it's a scam.
6. Profile missing or suspended? Don't make a new one. Use the appeals tool.
7. Still stuck? Call Bill at (330) 200-8042.