

Do you need a website if you have a Google profile?

Every business should have the free Google profile, and it comes first. What it can't do for a business that has to grow, and how to tell from your own customers' questions whether a website would earn its keep.

A Google profile is free, and for a lot of trades it's where the phone call starts. Every business should have one. On its own, though, it won't grow a business, and every business has to grow.

You should know who's telling you this. I build websites for small businesses, which is why this guide starts with the thing that costs nothing.

Google's own help page says it plainly: "You can add or claim your business at no charge." (Google) If you have never claimed yours, go and do step 01 of the sixty seconds guide and stop there for this week. That one step is worth more than everything else on this page.

If you have, the rest is about what the profile does well, where Google's own rules stop it, and how to work out from your customers' questions whether a website would pay its way for you. Sometimes it wouldn't, yet. Section 06 says when.

PART ONE — WHAT THE FREE PROFILE DOES AND DOESN'T

01 What the profile already does, at no charge

Google lists what a profile is for, and it's a decent list. You can "post photos and videos of your business and the products and services it offers," "collect and respond to reviews from customers," and "provide your business hours, website, phone number, and location so they're visible to customers on Google." (Google)

On a phone, that profile has a call button on it, and plenty of people tap it without going near anybody's website. The sixty seconds guide walks through that minute, so I won't repeat it here.

One more line from Google, worth knowing before somebody rings you about it: "There's no way to request or pay for a better local ranking on Google." (Google) Anyone selling you the top of the map is selling something Google says doesn't exist.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

- Open your profile and find the Performance page. For the last few months, write down three numbers: calls, website clicks and direction requests. (Google's definitions)

- Google counts a call as "the number of times a customer clicked on the call button on your Business Profile," so a regular who rings you from their contacts won't be in it.
- Keep the numbers where you'll find them again. Whatever you decide after this guide, they're how you'll see whether anything moved.

The profile is the floor. Every business should be standing on it.

02 What it can't do

A profile is a form, with Google's fields and Google's rules on each one. The questions people ask before they call don't fit neatly into them. Every limit below is from Google's own help pages.

- **The description.** Google wants "useful information on services and products offered, as well as the mission and history of your business." Its guidelines say the description must not "focus on special promotions, prices, and offer sales," and "No links of any type are allowed." (Google)
- **Prices go in the services list,** if your category has one. "Businesses in certain categories, like service businesses, might have the option to showcase their offerings directly on their Business Profile," and each service can carry a price and a description. (Google) That's a line per service. It won't hold the "depends on the size, from X" terms most trades actually quote on. And if you write your own service names, Google rejects any with a price in the name.
- **Service areas.** "You can have up to 20 service areas," and the whole area "shouldn't be more than about 2 hours of driving time from where your business is based." (Google)
- **Chat is gone.** Google says "the chat and call history features are no longer available"; they were switched off by July 31, 2024. (Google) A customer has no way to send you the photos, the address and the size of the job through the profile. Google points businesses to booking links and text messaging instead, which means sending people somewhere else.

And some things have no field at all. How the job goes from first call to finish. Whether they need to be home. Which jobs you don't take. A price sheet with its conditions.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

- Write down the questions customers ask you every week, and next to each one, the answer you give. The notes app on your phone will do.
- Open the profile and go down the list. Which of them can it answer, inside Google's rules?
- Put in what fits. Services with their prices, if your category offers services. The description gets what you do and where you do it, with no prices and no links in it.
- Mark whatever's left over.

This is the exercise the rest of the guide hangs on.

The questions still on that list are the case for a website, in your customers' own words. If nothing's left, that's the case against, and section 06 is for you.

03 It's Google's page, and Google changes it

You manage the profile. Google owns it.

Google says it "gathers info from different sources, like user reports and licensed content," and uses that to update profiles. When it suggests a change to yours, "Once notified, you have 4 days to accept or reject the suggestion." (Google)

Then this, from the same page: "Google may automatically publish the update if it is supported by other publicly available information, such as your business website." Google is telling you what it checks your profile against, and a website is one of the things it names.

It also switches things off. Profile chat and call history were gone by July 31, 2024 (Google). The same year, Google turned off the free websites it used to make from profiles (Search Engine Roundtable). Neither had anything to do with how a particular business was run. It's somebody else's product, and they change it on their own schedule.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

- Open the profile and read every field as it stands today: hours, phone, website, categories, services.
- Check each one still says what you set.
- If Google has sent you a suggested edit, deal with it inside the 4 days.

Your profile can change without you touching it. A website changes when you change it.

PART TWO — WHAT THE PROFILE CAN'T GROW

04 Standing still is going backwards

This is why I say a profile on its own is never enough to grow a business.

Prices in the US rose 3.4% in the 12 months to August 2026, by the government's Consumer Price Index. In the Bureau of Labor Statistics' words: "Over the last 12 months, the all items index increased 3.4 percent before seasonal adjustment." (BLS, September 11, 2026) If you drive to the work, your fuel receipts already know the worst of it: gasoline rose 27.4% over the same 12 months.

Flat revenue is a pay cut. An example, with made-up round numbers: a business that took in \$80,000 last year and takes in \$80,000 again this year can buy about what \$77,370 bought a year ago, if its costs rose in line with the index.

Your costs may not have. "The Consumer Price Index (CPI) measures the change in prices paid by consumers for goods and services," which is what households pay. Your fuel, insurance, parts and supplies may have gone up faster than that, or slower. The box below gets you your own number.

How much growth is enough? Prices alone are up about 3.4% right now. I aim for around 9% a year, because costs aren't the only thing that moves: competitors get better, customers expect more, and the market shifts without sending a letter first. That 9% is my own rule of thumb, and you might set yours higher or lower. On the arithmetic alone, a business growing 4% with prices up 3.4% is still a little ahead. A little ahead doesn't leave much room for a bad winter.

Growth comes from more jobs, better jobs or higher prices. Raising your prices covers the last of those. A profile can bring you more calls. It can't explain why you cost what you cost, or make the case for the bigger job before the phone rings.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

- Find last year's revenue and this year's so far, for the same months, so the comparison is fair.
- Pull three bills you pay every month (fuel, insurance, your main supplier) from a year ago and from now. Work out how much each one rose. That's your own inflation figure, and it may well not be 3.4%.
- For the fuller picture, the worksheet in the Toolkit (free, at the foot of this page) works out what you actually earn an hour, and move 05 of the slow season playbook works out what a lean month costs.

Grow by nothing and rising prices take the difference out of your pay.

05 What a website adds

Go back to the list from section 02, the questions the profile couldn't hold. A website is where each of them gets answered before anybody has to ask:

- The price sheet, with its conditions.
- How the job works, start to finish, and what to have ready.
- The towns you cover, written out in words.
- The jobs you don't take, so the wrong ones don't call.

Add a form that asks for what you need to quote: photos of the job, the address, the size. Then your first reply can be a price instead of three questions. With profile chat gone, a site is where a written enquiry lands.

Google's ranking page says prominence is "based on info like how many websites link to your business and how many reviews you have." (Google) That means other sites linking to you, and a

site of your own gives the supplier, the local paper or the business association something to link to. Google doesn't say a website lifts your profile by itself, so I won't either. It does say, back in section 03, that a website is one of the things it checks profile edits against.

What the first screen has to do is in step 06 of the sixty seconds guide: confirm that you do this, you do it here, and you can be reached.

A site needs looking after. One with last year's prices on it does more harm than having no site at all.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

- Take the leftover questions from section 02. Under each one, write the answer the way you'd want a stranger to read it at ten at night, when they can't ring you to ask.
- Keep it all in one note.

That note is most of a website's words, written by the only person who knows them. Build a site this year or don't; the note is yours either way.

Most of a website's words are answers you already give out loud every week.

06 When the profile is enough, for now

Sometimes the honest answer is not yet.

If you're booked weeks out and turning work away, more calls won't help, because you can't take them. You can hold off on a website. The business still has to grow, though, and with the calendar full, the growth has to come from your price. Raising your prices is the guide for that, starting with the signs you're already too cheap.

Two other signs it can wait:

- Nearly all your work comes from one source that never looks you up: one contractor, one property manager.
- Your list from section 02 came out short, and the profile answers every question on it.

Even then, fill the profile in properly (steps 01 to 05 of the sixty seconds guide), and keep the note from section 05. When the answer changes, the website's words are already written.

With the calendar full, the next raise you get is the one you give your prices.

WHERE TO START

If you do one thing from this guide, write the questions list from section 02. If you do two, add the revenue comparison from section 04. Neither costs anything, and neither needs a website.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

- No profile yet? Claim it (sixty seconds, step 01). If that's all you get done this week, that's fine.
- Open Performance and write down calls, website clicks and direction requests. That's your baseline.
- Write down the questions customers ask every week, with your answer to each.
- Put what fits into the profile: services (with prices, where your category has services) and the description (no prices, no links). Mark what doesn't fit.
- Read every field on the profile as it stands today and check Google hasn't changed it. Answer any suggested edit within 4 days.
- Compare this year's revenue to last year's for the same months, and three monthly bills to a year ago. That's your own inflation figure.
- For each question that didn't fit the profile, write the answer the way you'd want a stranger to read it. Keep it in one note.

None of it costs anything, and none of it needs a website.

Claim the profile. Write down the questions. Grow faster than prices do.

Section 05 is the one I can check for you. If you have a website, send it to me and I'll test your contact form, check it on a phone, and see whether Google can tell which towns you cover. You'll get a short list of fixes within two business days, free, and it obliges you to nothing.

Written by JT Creeden at RedHorseWebDev, who builds websites for small businesses anywhere in the US. The whole guide is free to read at redhorsewebdev.com/learn — this PDF is just easier to keep.