# Start Here: Get Found Online, Free

*A do-it-yourself runbook for owner-operated trades and small businesses, from Spearworks AI*

Thirteen fixes you can do yourself. Most take an hour or less, and none of them need software or a hire. A few go faster on a computer than a phone.

The work I see slip away usually comes down to small things: hours on Google that say Closed when you're picking up the phone, a number on the map that doesn't match the one on the truck, a Facebook link that goes nowhere. A customer who hits one of those usually doesn't call to ask. They call the next contractor on the list.

**How to use this:**

- Going in order helps. The early fixes make the later ones pay off, and there's no point asking for reviews on a profile that says you're closed.
- One fix per sitting is plenty. Every item ends with a "done when" check you can see for yourself.
- A notepad for the logins you create will save you later.

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## 1. Claim and verify your Google Business Profile

**Why it matters.** Your Business Profile is the listing that shows up on Google Maps and in that box of businesses near the top when someone searches "deck builder near me." It's where people tap to call you or get directions, and Google counts each of those for you. Until you claim it, you can't fix anything else on it.

**Steps:**

1. Search your business name on Google Maps. If a listing shows up with "Own this business?" or "Claim this business," tap it. If nothing shows up, start fresh at Google's add or claim page.
2. If someone else already manages it (a past employee, an old web company), use Google's request ownership process rather than creating a second listing. Duplicates split your reviews and confuse Google.
3. If you work at customers' homes and don't see customers at your own address, set yourself up as a service-area business. Google's guidelines say a service-area business should hide its address, and you list the towns you serve instead.
4. Verify. Google decides which verification options you're offered. A common one is a video verification, recorded live through your Business Profile on your phone (in Google Maps or

Search): one unbroken take, at least 30 seconds. For a service-area business, Google asks to see:

5. Street signs or landmarks near your business address (your own neighborhood works if you run it from home)
6. Your tools, equipment, branded truck, or business cards
7. Proof you run it, like unlocking your branded van or showing an invoice or permit in the business name

Keep other people's faces and private numbers out of the shot. Google says review can take up to 5 business days.

**Done when:** you sign in, open your profile, and it no longer asks you to verify. Your listing shows up on Maps when you search your business name.

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## 2. One name, one phone, one address, everywhere

**Why it matters.** Google, Bing, Yelp, Nextdoor, and the AI assistants people now ask for recommendations all cross-check your details against each other. When your business name, address, and phone number (folks in my line of work call this NAP) don't match, they trust all of it less. That's also how wrong details end up in an AI answer about your business.

**Steps:**

1. Write down the one version you want everywhere: exact business name, one phone number, and your address (or just your city, if you're a service-area business).
2. Pick one main phone number. Google's guidelines ask for a number that connects directly to your business and that you control. A cell you answer beats an old landline nobody checks.
3. Search your business name and your phone number on Google. Open every listing on the first two pages: your website, Facebook, Yelp, Nextdoor, Angi, BBB, the Chamber directory, anything else.
4. Fix each one to match your written version. Write down any you can't log in to, and recover those logins this week.

**Done when:** a search for your business name shows the same name and phone number on every listing on page one.

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## 3. Tap your own phone number

**Why it matters.** Most of your customers find you on a phone. On a lot of sites the number looks fine but does nothing when tapped, or dials an old number, because the link behind it was never updated. I run into this a lot, and it's invisible from a laptop.

**Steps:**

1. Open your website on your phone, not your computer.
2. Tap every phone number on the site: header, footer, contact page, any "Call now" button.
3. Each one should open your phone's dialer with the right number already filled in.
4. Do the same on your Google Business Profile and Facebook page.
5. If one is wrong, edit the button or link in your website builder and look for a "link to phone" option. If you can't find it, write it down for whoever built your site.

**Done when:** every number you tap on your phone opens the dialer with your current number, ready to call.

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## 4. Real business hours

**Why it matters.** "Closed" on Google is the fastest way to lose a call. If the hours on your profile are wrong, Google tells customers you're closed at times you'd happily pick up, and a lot of folks read "Closed" as "out of business." A note for trades: Google's guidelines say businesses that operate only by appointment shouldn't list hours. If you answer the phone during regular hours, list those. If you truly work by appointment only, leave hours off and let your phone number and website do the talking.

**Steps:**

1. In your Business Profile, edit your business hours to match when you actually answer the phone and return calls. That's the window customers care about.
2. If you list hours, choose "Open with main hours." Google notes that if you pick "Open with no main hours," special hours won't display.
3. Add special hours for holidays coming up. Google suggests confirming holiday hours even when they're the same as normal, so customers know they're accurate.
4. Put the same hours on your website and Facebook page.

**Done when:** you search your business name on Google during your listed hours and it says "Open." Appointment only? Done when no wrong hours show anywhere.

## 5. Social links that work both ways

**Why it matters.** A broken Facebook or Instagram icon on your site tells a customer nobody's minding the store. And when your profiles link back to your site, it helps Google and the AI tools connect all the pieces as one business.

**Steps:**

1. On your website, click every social icon. Each should open your actual business page. Broken links and personal profiles are the usual misses.
2. Remove icons for any account you don't use. An empty Instagram from 2021 does more harm than no icon.
3. On each social profile you keep, put your website address and your one phone number in the About or bio section.
4. Add your website and social profiles to your Business Profile if they aren't there.

**Done when:** every social icon on your site opens your real, active page, and every one of those pages links back to your website.

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## 6. Your license number and trust signals on the site

**Why it matters.** If your trade is licensed, the number belongs on your site. For Oregon contractors it isn't optional: the Construction Contractors Board's advertising rule says contractor website advertising must visibly show your CCB license number, along with business cards, signs at job sites, and other written ads. The same rule bars claiming you're licensed, bonded, or insured without a current license. Customers also use the number to look you up before they hire you. A visible license number is one of the cheapest trust signals you have.

**Steps:**

1. Look yourself up on the CCB license search and confirm your license, bond, and insurance all show active.
2. Add your license number (for Oregon contractors, "CCB #000000") to your website footer so it's on every page. Add it to your Business Profile description, Facebook About section, and business cards.
3. Near your contact info, say plainly what's true: "Licensed, bonded, and insured." Add years in business and the towns you serve.

4. If you have real affiliations (Chamber, a trade association, a manufacturer certification), add them by name.

**Done when:** your license number shows at the bottom of every page on your site, and a stranger could verify you with your licensing board in under a minute.

*Not in Oregon or not a contractor? Swap in your state's license or certification. The trust principle is the same.*

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## 7. Real photos of real jobs

**Why it matters.** People hiring a contractor want to see the work. Photos of your actual jobs, crew, and truck do more than any sentence you could write, and Google shows them right on your profile.

**Steps:**

1. Pick 10 to 20 of your best recent job photos. Before and after pairs work great.
2. Add them to your Business Profile under Photos. Add a photo of your truck or signage and one of you or the crew.
3. Skip stock photos and anything with a customer's house number or face showing unless you have their OK.
4. Make it a habit: after every finished job, add two or three photos.

**Done when:** your Business Profile has at least 10 photos of your own work, and the newest one is less than a month old.

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## 8. One page for the job you most want more of

**Why it matters.** Most trade websites have one "Services" page that lists everything. Google can't tell from that what you're best at, and neither can a customer. Pick the work that pays best or that you most want to do, and give it its own page. That's the page with a shot at showing up when someone searches for exactly that job.

**Steps:**

1. Ask yourself: if the phone only rang for one kind of job next month, which one would you pick? That's your page.
2. Create one new page on your site named for it, in the words a customer would search: "Composite Deck Building in Happy Valley," not "Outdoor Living Solutions."

3. On the page, answer what a customer would ask you on the first call: what you build, materials you use, the towns you serve, roughly how long a job takes, and how to reach you.
4. Add photos from item 7, your CCB number, and a clear call or contact button.
5. Link to the new page from your home page.

**Done when:** the page is live, it's linked from your home page, and you'd be proud to text the link to a prospect.

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## 9. Ask for reviews, and answer every one

**Why it matters.** Reviews are one of the first things people read before they call, and the thing most owners never ask for. Happy customers rarely leave one on their own. They're glad to when you ask and make it easy.

**Steps:**

1. In your Business Profile, open Reviews, then "Get more reviews," and copy your review link. From a computer you can also download a QR code.
2. Save the link where you'll use it: your phone's notes, the bottom of your invoices, your thank-you text or email.
3. Ask every customer when the job wraps, in your own words: "Would you mind leaving us a quick Google review? Here's the link."
4. Ask everyone, including the jobs that had a bump. Google's review policy prohibits offering anything in exchange for a review (no discounts, no freebies), and it also prohibits asking only your happy customers.
5. Reply to every review, good or bad. A short, specific thank-you is plenty. On a bad one, stay calm and offer to make it right offline.

**Done when:** your review link is saved where you'll use it, you've asked your last five customers, and every review on your profile has a reply.

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## 10. Set up Google Search Console

**Why it matters.** Search Console is Google's free report on what people searched before they found your website, and which of your pages Google can and can't read. It only starts collecting when you add your site, so every month you wait is a month you can't look back on later.

**Steps:**

1. Go to Google Search Console and sign in with the same Google account you use for your Business Profile.
2. Choose a Domain property and type your domain (yourbusiness.com). It covers every version of your address.
3. Google will give you a line of text to add to your domain's DNS. DNS is the settings page at the company where you bought your domain name (GoDaddy, Squarespace, Namecheap, and so on). Search "[your domain company] add TXT record" for their exact steps.
4. Go back to Search Console and click Verify. It can take a few minutes to a day.
5. Check back in a month. Under Performance you'll see the searches you showed up for.

**Done when:** Search Console shows your domain as verified, and you can open the Performance report.

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## 11. Bing Places and Bing Webmaster Tools

**Why it matters.** Bing is Microsoft's search engine, and Bing Webmaster Tools now shows when your site is cited in Microsoft Copilot answers. Microsoft says registering with Bing Places helps keep your address, hours and contact details current and eligible for AI-generated answers. If you finished items 1 and 10, most of the work is already done.

**Steps:**

1. Go to Bing Places for Business and sign in. Choose to import your listing from Google, so the name, phone and hours you fixed in items 1 to 4 carry over.
2. Finish whatever verification Bing asks for, then check that the imported details match your written version from item 2.
3. Go to Bing Webmaster Tools and choose to import from Google Search Console. Bing verifies your site for you, as long as it stays connected to your Search Console account.

**Done when:** your business shows on Bing Maps with the same name, phone and hours as Google, and your site shows as verified in Bing Webmaster Tools.

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## 12. Claim your business in ChatGPT

**Why it matters.** Since November 10, 2026, OpenAI lets businesses claim their listing in ChatGPT. It's in beta. OpenAI's terms say it may show a listing for your business whether or not you claim it. Claiming doesn't guarantee more visibility. It's how you keep the facts right.

**Read the terms first.** Opening Business Hub counts as agreeing to them. Three things worth knowing:

- You agree OpenAI's AI assistant may phone your business for its users. You can opt out at realtime.chatgpt.com/stopcalls.
- Claiming doesn't give you exclusive control. OpenAI can still change your listing using other sources.
- Basic details you submit for public display, like name, address, phone, category, hours and website, are licensed to OpenAI for good, and you can't take that back.

**Steps:**

1. In ChatGPT, open Business Hub from the sidebar, or go to chatgpt.com/business-hub, and search for your business. OpenAI's setup guide says local stores and restaurants can currently claim only a U.S. listing that's already there. If yours isn't, check back later. If someone else already claimed it, open the listing, tap the ••• menu, and choose Dispute ownership.
2. Verify the claim with one of the methods your listing offers: business phone, business email, Shopify, or a code added to your domain's DNS (the same settings page as item 10).
3. After the claim is approved, you'll verify your identity with Persona, an ID check service OpenAI uses. Have your business registration, a government ID, and proof you can act for the business ready. Put the legal name from your registration in the legal-name field and any trade name in the DBA field.
4. Once your identity check is approved, update your website, description, category, logo and cover photo. Check that the name, phone and address shown match item 2. If they don't, contact OpenAI Support. OpenAI reviews changes before they appear.

**Done when:** your listing shows the blue verified check in Business Hub. Insights (mentions and website clicks over the past 28 days) may stay blank until there's enough activity to report. That's normal.

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## 13. Make sure AI assistants can read your site

**Why it matters.** Claude, Anthropic's assistant, has no listing to claim. Claude, ChatGPT, Copilot and Google all read your website, and one small file called robots.txt can block them, sometimes by accident. Anthropic says blocking two of its bots, Claude-SearchBot and Claude-User, may reduce your visibility in Claude's search results.

**Steps:**

1. Type your web address with /robots.txt on the end into a browser: yourbusiness.com/robots.txt.
2. If you get a "page not found," robots.txt isn't blocking anyone. Skip to step 5.
3. If a page of text opens, look for a "Disallow: /" line (a slash with nothing after it) under a list of names that includes any of these: Googlebot, Bingbot, OAI-SearchBot, Claude-SearchBot, Claude-User, or a plain asterisk (*), which means every crawler without its own section. Several names can share one Disallow line, and capital letters don't matter.
4. If you see GPTBot or ClaudeBot blocked, you can leave that. Those only collect training data. If one of the names in step 3 is blocked, send a screenshot to whoever built your site and ask them to remove the block.
5. If your site uses Cloudflare or another security service, ask your web person whether it blocks AI bots. That won't show up in robots.txt.

**Done when:** none of the names in step 3, and no asterisk, are in a list that ends in a "Disallow: /" line.

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## Your scorecard

| # | Fix | Done? |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Google Business Profile claimed and verified | |
| 2 | Same name and phone everywhere | |
| 3 | Every phone number taps to dial | |
| 4 | Hours right, or left off if by appointment | |
| 5 | Social links work both ways | |
| 6 | License number on every page | |
| 7 | 10+ real job photos on your profile | |
| 8 | A page for your best job | |
| 9 | Review link in use, every review answered | |
| 10 | Search Console verified | |
| 11 | Bing Places claimed, Bing Webmaster Tools imported | |
| 12 | ChatGPT listing claimed and verified | |
| 13 | AI assistants not blocked in robots.txt | |

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## When you're ready to grow

Get through this list and you're ahead of most of the businesses in your town. Nothing here needs me.

From there, we'd work closely together: connecting your site, your profile, and your reviews, and tracking which calls they bring in.

If you get stuck on any of these, or want a second set of eyes, I'm happy to be a resource. The first consult is free.

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Spearworks AI, Portland, Oregon. spearworksai.com. This runbook is free to share with another owner who could use it.