

AI EDITION • 2026

LOCAL SEARCH SIMPLIFIED

The established owner's guide to winning **Google, the Map Pack & AI Search**

How to get found, get *chosen*, and finally prove which of your marketing actually makes you money — across Google, Apple Maps, and AI search.

By

David Ronald Esau

CLICK TRACK MARKETING

READ THIS FIRST

What Changed — And Why This Edition Exists

Every dollar you put into marketing should answer one question: is it actually making me money? For most business owners, that has never had a clear answer. This edition is about finally getting one.

Two things shifted under your feet at the same time. First, **where** your customers find you changed — local search split into three surfaces, and a brand-new one showed up that most of your competitors are ignoring: **AI search**. Second, for the first time, you can connect your marketing directly to the calls, bookings, and revenue it produces, and see exactly what's working.

The first edition of this book taught local businesses how to show up on Google and Apple Maps. That's still true, and it's where we'll spend most of our pages. But now, when someone asks ChatGPT "who's the best pool builder in Carlsbad?", or Google answers with an AI Overview before a single blue link, a decision gets made before you're even in the running. Being found is a moving target again.

So this book does two things: it shows you how to get found and chosen across Google, the Map pack, and AI, and how to finally prove which of that marketing makes you money. We'll build to that second part; it's the biggest shift of all. Everything here is what we do for our clients every day — no theory, no fluff.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Contents

PART I • THE NEW LOCAL SEARCH LANDSCAPE

01 Why "Ranking on Google" Isn't Enough Anymore

02 How Your Customers Actually Search in 2026

PART II • OWN YOUR PRESENCE

03 Google Business Profile & Apple Maps: Winning the Map Pack

04 NAP, Citations & Your Business Entity

05 A Website Built to Convert *and* Be Cited

PART III • THE NEW FRONTIER

06 Answer Engine Optimization: Getting Recommended by AI

07 Reviews & Reputation — for Customers *and* Algorithms

PART IV • PROVE IT & COMPOUND IT

08 Backlinks & Local Authority

09 Is Your Marketing Actually Making You Money?

10 Your 90-Day Local Domination Plan

01. Why "Ranking on Google" Isn't Enough Anymore

There is no single "first page of Google" anymore. There are three surfaces where local decisions get made — and you have to win all three.

For years, local SEO meant one thing: get your website and your map listing onto page one. Simple. Today a customer searching for what you sell can get an answer three completely different ways, often without ever scrolling a list of links:

The Map Pack

The block of 3 map results (Google & Apple Maps) that sits above everything for "near me" searches. Most local intent lands here first.

Organic Results

The classic blue links and your website. Still the backbone of trust and the source AI engines quote from.

AI Answers

ChatGPT, Google AI Overviews, Perplexity, Gemini. One recommended answer, not ten options. The newest and least-contested channel.

The "zero-click" reality

A growing share of searches now end without anyone visiting a website. The customer got their answer — a name, a rating, a phone number, a recommendation — right there in the results. That is good news if you're the business being shown, and invisible-to-the-market bad news if you're not. Winning is no longer just "rank." It's **be the answer**.

"Being great at what you do isn't enough. If a customer can't find you — or an AI never names you — you don't exist in that moment."

A tale of two established businesses

Picture two well-run companies in the same city, both with happy customers and years in business. The first shows up in the Map pack, ranks for its services, and gets named when someone asks an AI for a recommendation. The second has a better product but a thin, out-of-date online presence. When a ready-to-buy customer searches — or asks ChatGPT — only one of them is in the conversation. Over a year, that gap is not a few leads. It's the difference between growing and quietly losing ground to a competitor who simply showed up.

THE CLICK TRACK TAKE

You don't have to win everywhere. You have to win where *your* buyer looks.

The goal of this book is to make you the obvious, credible answer across all three surfaces — and to prove it with tracking, not vanity metrics.

PART I · THE NEW LOCAL SEARCH LANDSCAPE

02. How Your Customers Actually Search in 2026

Your customer's path from "I need this" to "I'm calling them" now runs through maps, reviews, and AI — usually on a phone, usually in minutes.

To win the three surfaces, you have to understand how a real person moves through them. The modern local buyer rarely visits ten websites and compares. They take a shortcut, and that shortcut is built on trust signals you either have or don't.

The modern buyer journey

- **They search with intent.** "Emergency plumber near me," "best invisalign in La Jolla," "commercial roofing Oceanside." High-intent, local, ready to act.
- **They ask AI for a shortlist.** Increasingly the first move is ChatGPT or an AI Overview: "who should I call for X in my area?" — and they trust the recommendation.
- **They judge you on reviews in seconds.** Star rating, review count, recency, and how you respond. This is where most decisions are actually won or lost.
- **They act from the results.** A tap to call, get directions, or book — often before ever seeing your website.

What this means for an established business

You already have the hard part: a real business with real customers and a real reputation. The problem is almost never quality. It's that your online presence doesn't *reflect* your quality at the exact moments a buyer is deciding. The rest of this book is about closing that gap — being present, credible, and chosen at every step of that journey.

3

surfaces you must show up on
(Map pack, organic, AI)

Reviews

the single biggest factor in the
final choice

Mobile

where most "near me" decisions
happen

PART II • OWN YOUR PRESENCE

03. Google Business Profile & Apple Maps: Winning the Map Pack

Your Google Business Profile is the single most valuable piece of digital real estate a local business owns. For most searches, it works harder than your website.

You may still call it "Google My Business" — Google renamed it **Google Business Profile (GBP)**. Whatever you call it, when someone searches for your business or your service nearby, this is what they see first: your rating, hours, photos, and the tap-to-call button. A complete, active profile is the foundation of every local ranking.

What actually moves your map ranking

Google ranks the Map pack on three things: **proximity** (how close you are to the searcher), **relevance** (how well your profile matches what they want), and **prominence** (how well-known and trusted you are). You can't move your building, but you own relevance and prominence:

- **Categories.** Your primary category is the biggest lever on the profile. Choose the most specific one that fits, then add relevant secondary categories.
- **Complete every field.** Services with real descriptions, service areas, hours, attributes, products. Empty fields are missed rankings.
- **Photos, consistently.** Real photos of your work, team, and location — added regularly, not once at setup.
- **Google Posts & Q&A.** Fresh posts and answered questions signal an active, real business.
- **Reviews.** The prominence engine. (Chapter 7 is entirely about this.)

Don't ignore Apple Maps

With roughly a billion iPhones in use, Apple Maps drives real "near me" traffic — and it's far less competitive than Google. Claim and optimize your listing through **Apple Business Connect**. When someone asks Siri or uses Maps on an iPhone, you want to be there too.

THE GEO-GRID TRUTH

"We rank #3" is a myth. You rank differently on every block.

Map rankings change with the searcher's exact location. A business can be #1 at its front door and invisible three miles away. We track rankings as a geo-grid across your whole service area — because one number hides where you're actually winning and losing customers.

PART II · OWN YOUR PRESENCE

04. NAP, Citations & Your Business Entity

Consistent business information used to be about not confusing customers. Now it also teaches Google and AI models exactly who you are — so they can confidently recommend you.

NAP stands for Name, Address, Phone (add your Website and it's NAP+W). A **citation** is any place online that lists your business info — directories, chambers, industry sites, data aggregators. When your details are identical everywhere, you build something bigger than tidy listings: a clear **entity**.

Why the "entity" matters more than ever

Search engines and AI models don't just index pages — they build a model of real-world things and how confident they are about the facts. When your name, address, phone, categories, and services line up across the web, that model gets stronger. A strong, consistent entity is easier to rank *and* easier for an AI to name without hesitation. Inconsistency does the opposite: it introduces doubt, and doubt is why you get left out.

Where to build citations

- **The core data aggregators** that feed hundreds of downstream directories.
- **Industry-specific sites** relevant to your trade or profession.
- **Local sites** — chamber of commerce, local business associations, community directories.
- **The big platforms** — Yelp, Facebook, Bing Places, Apple Maps.

Build them once, correctly, then keep them consistent. A single old address or a swapped phone number after a move can quietly drag on your rankings for months.

DO THIS FIRST

Audit your NAP before you build anything new.

Old suite numbers, a previous phone line, "LLC" on some listings and not others — clean up what exists before adding more. Consistency beats volume every time.

PART II • OWN YOUR PRESENCE

05. A Website Built to Convert and Be Cited

Your website has two jobs now: turn visitors into customers, and give AI engines something they can quote. Most local websites do neither well.

The old advice — "have a mobile-friendly site with keywords" — is table stakes. The bar moved. Your site needs to be fast, structured, and written in a way that both people and machines can pull clear answers from.

The foundations (non-negotiable)

- **Speed.** A slow site loses customers and rankings. Compress images, keep it lean, pass Core Web Vitals.
- **Mobile-first.** This is where your buyers are. It has to be effortless on a phone.
- **Clear structure.** A logical hierarchy search engines can crawl and visitors can navigate without thinking.

The pattern that wins local: service + location pages

One generic "Services" page can't rank for every service in every area you cover. Dedicated pages — each service, each key location — are how you become relevant for the specific searches that bring customers, and they give AI engines a precise page to cite for a precise question.

Structured data & answer-first content

Add **schema markup** (LocalBusiness, Service, FAQ) so engines understand your content instead of guessing. Then write **answer-first**: lead each page and FAQ with a direct, self-contained answer to the real question a customer asks. That is exactly the format AI engines lift into their responses — and it's the bridge into the next chapter.

THE CLICK TRACK TAKE

Traffic you can't convert is a rented audience.

Every page needs an obvious next step — call, book, or request a quote — with tracking on it. Ranking is only half the job; the page has to turn the visit into a customer, and you have to be able to prove it did.

PART III • THE NEW FRONTIER

06. Answer Engine Optimization: Getting Recommended by AI

This is the chapter your competitors don't have. Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) is how you become the business AI engines name — and right now it's the least-contested opportunity in local marketing.

SEO gets you ranked. **AEO** gets you *recommended*. When a customer asks ChatGPT, Google's AI Overview, Perplexity, or Gemini for the best option in your area, one or two businesses get named. AEO is the work of making sure that's you. Very few local businesses are optimizing for this yet, which is exactly why the window is open.

How AI decides who to recommend

- **Crawlable, answer-first content.** AI pulls from pages that answer the question directly and clearly. If your answer is buried or the page can't be read, you're skipped.
- **A clear entity.** The consistent NAP and categories from Chapter 4 tell the model exactly who you are and what you do.
- **Reputation.** AI reads reviews and sentiment. A strong, current review profile makes you a "safe" recommendation.
- **Third-party corroboration.** Being mentioned on the sites and directories AI already trusts.
- **Bing indexing.** Copilot and ChatGPT's search lean heavily on Bing's index. If you're not in Bing Webmaster Tools, you're invisible to a big slice of AI search. Most businesses forget Bing entirely.

What to actually do

- Publish **FAQ and "best/how/what" content** that answers the exact questions buyers ask, in plain language.

- Add **structured data** so engines can parse your answers with confidence.
- **Get indexed in Bing** and submit your sitemap — the fastest AEO win most businesses are missing.
- Earn **mentions and reviews** on the sources AI trusts for your industry and city.

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

The businesses that show up in AI answers today will be very hard to displace tomorrow.

Early, consistent presence compounds. This is the same opportunity local SEO was a decade ago — before everyone was doing it. We track exactly which AI engines cite you, and for which questions, so this stops being a guess.

PART III • THE NEW FRONTIER

07. Reviews & Reputation — for Customers and Algorithms

Reviews are the highest-leverage local asset you have. They win the customer's click, lift your map ranking, and now tell AI engines you're worth recommending — all at once.

For an established business, reviews are often the entire decision. A prospect comparing you to a competitor two blocks away will pick on rating, review count, recency, and how you respond. And the same signals that persuade a human now persuade a machine: AI reads review sentiment when deciding who to name.

What Google (and AI) weigh

- **Volume** — more genuine reviews than your competitors.
- **Rating** — a strong average, ideally in the 4.7–4.9 range (a suspiciously perfect 5.0 can read as fake).
- **Recency** — a steady, current flow beats a burst two years ago.
- **Responses** — replying to every review, good and bad, signals an active, caring business.

Make asking effortless

The businesses with the best review profiles don't rely on customers remembering. They automate the ask: a QR code at the counter or table, and an automated text and email after every job that sends the happy customer straight to your review link. Then a gentle follow-up weeks later to bring them back. Done consistently, this quietly becomes your strongest ranking and conversion asset.

"Most consumers read reviews before choosing a local business. Your rating isn't marketing — it's the storefront."

Handling negative reviews

You will get them. Respond publicly, calmly, and quickly: acknowledge, apologize where fair, and move the detail to a private conversation. Handled well, a negative review becomes proof you're a real, responsive business — which is more trustworthy than a wall of flawless five stars.

PART IV • PROVE IT & COMPOUND IT

08. Backlinks & Local Authority

Backlinks are votes of confidence from other websites. They still build the authority that ranks you — and they corroborate your entity for AI. Quality beats quantity, every time.

When a reputable site links to you, it vouches for you. A handful of strong, relevant links does far more than hundreds of spammy ones — and the wrong kind of links can actively hurt you. For a local business, the best links are usually close to home.

Where local authority comes from

- **Local partnerships** — suppliers, complementary businesses, cross-promotions.
- **Community involvement** — sponsorships, local events, charities, chambers.
- **Industry sites and press** — trade associations, local news, relevant publications.
- **Genuinely useful content** that others want to reference.

Learn from your competitors

The businesses outranking you have a link profile you can study. Tools like SEMrush or Ahrefs reveal where their links come from — and many of those sources are opportunities you can earn too. Skip the shortcuts: bought links and link farms are a fast way to a penalty.

PART IV · PROVE IT & COMPOUND IT

09. Is Your Marketing Actually Making You Money?

It's the oldest question in marketing, and for most owners it's never had a straight answer. This is the chapter where it finally does.

You invest in marketing. Leads come in, the phone rings, jobs get booked. But ask which channel actually produced the revenue — Google, the Map pack, ads, AI, referrals — and the honest answer is usually a shrug. That's not your fault. Standard analytics were never built to answer it. So we rebuilt the measurement, and it's the most important thing in this book.

The attribution problem

A lead lands in your inbox with no source attached. A sale closes weeks after the first click. Your ad platform, your website analytics, and your CRM each tell a different story. So marketing gets judged on gut feel and vanity metrics — impressions, "traffic," likes — none of which pay your bills. **Attribution** is the discipline of tracing every customer back to the marketing that created them. Get it right and the money question finally has an answer.

Step 1 — Sort your traffic with GA4 channel groups

Google Analytics 4 files every visit under a "channel" — Organic, Paid, Direct, and so on. The defaults are crude, and they badly mislabel the newest traffic: visitors from ChatGPT, Perplexity, and other AI engines get dumped into "Referral" or "Unassigned," and Google Maps traffic disappears into the pile. If you can't see AI and Maps as their own channels, you can't value them.

The fix is a **custom channel group** that re-sorts every visit into clean, meaningful buckets: Organic Search, Paid Search, Paid Social, Google Maps, Email, Direct, and **AI Search as its own channel**, ranked above the rest. (AI engines have to be matched by their source, not their medium, or they keep hiding inside "referral.") Now your reports tell the truth about where customers come from, including the AI channel most businesses can't even see.

Step 2 — Connect that traffic to revenue

Clean channels are half the picture. The other half is tying them to money: call and form tracking that stamps every lead with its true source, first-touch attribution that survives the weeks between the first click and the close, and geo-grid and AI-visibility tracking so you know your position across your whole market. Now a channel isn't "traffic" — it's leads, booked jobs, and dollars you can put a number on.

YOUR REVENUE INTELLIGENCE DASHBOARD

Every visit sorted. Every lead attributed. Every dollar traced back to the marketing that earned it.

This is exactly what our revenue intelligence platform does, automatically, in one dashboard. It turns "I think the ads are working" into "this channel returned this much." See it at clicktrackanalytics.com.

And you own all of it — your website, your profiles, your ad accounts, your data. We run local search, AI search, reviews, and ads as one system for a predictable flat fee, and hand you a monthly summary you can actually read. Marketing should never be a black box. When you can see exactly what makes you money, you stop guessing, double down on what works, and compound your lead over competitors who are flying blind.

PART IV · PROVE IT & COMPOUND IT

10. Your 90-Day Local Domination Plan

Here's how to turn this book into results — a realistic 90-day sequence you can run in-house or hand to a partner.

Days 1–30 · Foundation

OWN YOUR PRESENCE AND START MEASURING

- ✓ Claim and fully optimize your Google Business Profile and Apple Maps listing
- ✓ Audit and fix NAP consistency across your core citations
- ✓ Get indexed in Bing Webmaster Tools and submit your sitemap
- ✓ Put call & form tracking in place so you can measure from day one

Days 31–60 · Content & AEO

BECOME FINDABLE AND QUOTABLE

- ✓ Build out service + location pages for what you sell and where
- ✓ Add schema markup and answer-first FAQ content
- ✓ Turn on a review-generation system (QR + automated text/email)
- ✓ Publish content that answers the exact questions AI engines get asked

Days 61–90 · Authority & Compounding

BUILD THE LEAD AND PROVE IT

- ✓ Earn local links through partnerships, sponsorships, and press
- ✓ Review your geo-grid rankings and AI visibility; fix the weak spots
- ✓ Tie results to booked revenue and reset priorities for the next quarter

In-house or get help?

Everything here is doable yourself — the question is whether it's the best use of your time. If you'd rather run your business than run its marketing, the last two pages are for you.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Great business. Now find out what's actually **making you money.**

You've got the two hardest things covered: a real business and real customers. The rest is showing up across Google, the Map pack, and AI, and finally seeing which of it drives revenue. Here's where to start.

STEP 1 • FREE

Your Online Visibility Score

See exactly where you stand across Google, Maps, and AI search — no cost, no commitment.



Scan to get your free score

STEP 2 • TALK

Book an AI Discovery Call

A straight conversation about your market and where the fastest wins are. Bring the book.



Scan to book your call

GO DEEPER • REVENUE INTELLIGENCE

See exactly what your marketing makes you
clicktrackanalytics.com

