The Google Reviews Playbook

Being found on Google and chosen on reviews: a step-by-step guide for home service business owners

Most home service businesses do good work for happy customers and still have almost no reviews to show for it. It is not a quality problem. It is a timing problem. Nobody asks at the right moment, when the job is done, the customer is standing there smiling, and saying yes would take ten seconds. By the evening, life has moved on, and even a customer who meant to leave a review forgets. At the same time, the Google listing itself is half-finished: a category picked in a hurry years ago, half the services missing, no recent photos, and a description that says almost nothing. Customers find that listing, compare it to two others that look complete and reviewed, and call someone else.

This playbook fixes both problems, in order: **Score → Compare → Rewrite → Ask → Reply → Protect → Verify.** Honest framing up front: this kit will NEVER promise you a ranking on Google, and you should run from anyone who does. Nobody outside Google controls where a listing ranks, and no honest system can guarantee it. What this kit does promise is narrower and real: a complete listing that says what you actually do, and a steady flow of fresh, honest reviews from real customers, because a complete listing and fresh reviews are what customers check before they call. In about 45 minutes of setup, with an AI assistant doing the typing, you score your listing, rewrite it, install the ask, and set up the habits that keep it alive.

If you own the Facebook Page Rescue Kit or the Speed to Lead Kit, this is the next piece. Those kits make the phone ring and make sure somebody answers fast. This kit makes sure you are found and chosen in the first place. It uses the same fact sheet, so most of Step 0 is already done.

Everything in this playbook is customized to YOUR business by one file. Learn Step 0 and the rest runs itself.

New to all this? Start with START-HERE.md instead. It is one page and 7 small steps. The short version of everything below: **you cannot break anything, nothing posts or sends to a real customer until you say go, and you never type into any file, you answer questions in plain English and the AI does the typing.** New words get a plain translation the first time they show up. Your Google Business Profile, also called a GBP or just your listing, means "your Google listing, the box that shows up when people search." A review link means "the shortcut that takes a customer straight to the review page." A service-area business means "a business that goes to the customer and does not show a street address."

Step 0: Fill the customization file (about 20 minutes, once)

business_profile.json is the engine of this whole kit. It holds your trade, business name, city and the towns you serve, your services with your real prices, your hours, your phone, your website, your brand colors and font, **your voice** (how you actually talk, words you use, words you never use), your team facts, your review proof, and two guard lists: the claims about your business that are provably TRUE, and the claims that are BANNED because you cannot prove them. Every template in this kit pulls from it with bracket placeholders like [business_name], [review_link], and [primary_city], the AI fills those brackets from your profile, so the words come out about your business, not a generic one.

This kit adds one section to that file: google. It holds your listing name exactly as it appears on Google, your primary category, your review link, your current review count, your current average rating, the names of your top 3 competitors, whether Google posts are OK for you to run, and whether a physical address is shown on your listing or you are a service-area business. These fields matter because every score, comparison, and rewrite in the steps below is measured against them. Get the review link and the competitor names exactly right, a wrong link sends happy customers to a dead page, and a guessed competitor list measures you against the wrong shops.

If you ran either sibling kit, you only add this section, every other field carries over unchanged. **You never fill this file in by typing into it, not this section, not any section.** The default way is: an AI assistant (the companion SKILL is

built for exactly that) fills it for you. The skill's intake rule says that if the profile is incomplete, the AI interviews you one question at a time, in plain English, listing name, primary category, review link, review count and rating today, top 3 competitors, posts yes or no, address shown or service-area, and fills the profile BEFORE it scores or rewrites a single word. The paper path is templates/answer-these-questions.md: answer in your own words, paste it back, and the AI converts it. Either way: no answers, no rewrite, because a listing built on guesses is worse than a half-finished one.

Beside the profile sits business_profile.example.json, the same file filled for a fictional handyman business (Brightpath Home Services, Springfield IL). Its owner is Dan, its phone is 555-013-4477, its primary category on Google is "Handyman," and it is a service-area business, so no street address shows. Read it if any field is unclear, then replace every value with your own verified facts.

Also read your trade's block in templates/trade-adapters.md now. A plumber and a handyman pick different primary categories, list different services, and get asked different questions by customers. Your trade block keeps the rewrite honest to the work you actually do.

Step 1: SCORE (about 10 minutes, read-only, change nothing)

Open templates/gbp-scorecard.md and grade your listing the way a stranger sees it. Search for your own business the way a customer in [primary_city] would, on a phone, and work down the scorecard line by line: Is the primary category the one that matches your main work? Are all your real services listed, with your real prices where you publish them? Is the description complete and current? Are your hours right, including Saturdays? Are attributes set, licensed and insured, owner on the job, free written estimates, whatever is provably true for you? When was the last photo added, and the last review? Write down your current review count and average rating from your profile, exactly as Google shows them today.

Be exact and be kind to yourself at the same time. Most owners find the same pattern: good business, unfinished listing, reviews that stopped months ago because asking depended on remembering. That pattern is the normal starting point, not a failure. For the fictional example used in this kit, Brightpath starts from 96 Google reviews at 4.9 stars, strong proof, but a listing can still lose the

click if the services are half-listed and the newest photo is old. The score tells you where the gaps are. This step changes nothing on Google, on purpose. You measure first so the rewrite in Step 3 fixes real gaps instead of guesses.

Done when: your scorecard has real counts, real dates, and every gap written in, not guesses. Nothing in this step changed anything, so there is nothing to undo.

Step 2: COMPARE (about 10 minutes, side by side)

Open templates/competitor-audit.md and fill it in for your top 3 competitors, the three names from the google section of your profile. Work only from what Google shows you, in public, the same way a customer sees it. For each competitor, write down: primary category, review count, average rating, how recent their newest review is, which services they list that you also do, how complete their description and photos look, and whether they post on Google. Put your own Step 1 numbers in the fourth column, side by side with theirs.

Read the finished audit for gaps you can actually close. If a competitor lists a service you also do but never listed, that is a rewrite item, not a mystery. If their newest review is from this week and yours is from months ago, that is an ask problem, and Step 4 is the fix. If their rating is higher but their count is low, freshness and steady asking matter more than chasing a perfect number. A useful comparison in the examples is ClearLine Plumbing, a fictional Springfield plumbing shop with Sam as owner and tech: 163 Google reviews at 4.8 stars, primary category "Plumber," Drain Cleaning from $129, and water heater replacement by free written estimate. ClearLine does not win because of a trick. It wins the comparison because its listing is complete and its reviews are fresh. Do not copy a competitor's words, prices, or claims, the audit is a measuring stick, never a script. And never write anything into your own listing that is not provably true for your business.

Done when: all three competitors are filled in from what Google actually shows, your own numbers sit beside them, and you have marked the gaps your rewrite will close.

Step 3: REWRITE (about 15 minutes, the full listing)

Open templates/profile-rewrite.md and rebuild the listing completely, using your scorecard gaps and your competitor audit. Five pieces, in this order:

1. **Primary category first.** Pick the one category that matches the main work customers hire you for, "Handyman" for Brightpath, "Plumber" for ClearLine. Add secondary categories only for work you genuinely do. The primary category is the single most important choice on the listing, so make it from your real work, not from a keyword list.
2. **Services, all of them.** List every service in your profile, with your real published prices where you have them and "free written estimate" where that is your truth. For Brightpath that means Handyman Service at $85/hr with a 1-hour minimum, and Kitchen Remodeling by free written estimate. A service you do but never listed is a job a customer gives to the shop that did list it.
3. **Description, up to 750 characters.** Write it in your voice from your profile: what you do, where you serve, how you work, and the proof you can stand behind. Brightpath's facts are licensed and insured, owner on every job, free written estimates, and 140+ five-star reviews across platforms, plain, neighborly, and true, with the sign-off voice the crew actually uses, and never words like synergy, leverage, game-changer, or cheap. Say less and mean all of it.
4. **Attributes and hours.** Set every attribute that is provably true and leave the rest off. Set your hours exactly as they are, for Brightpath, Mon-Fri 8-6, Sat 9-1, Sun closed, including holiday honesty. A customer who arrives to a wrong hour does not leave a kind review.
5. **The name rule, with no exceptions.** The business name on Google is your real legal or DBA name only, [business_name], exactly as customers know it. Never stuff the name with keywords, services, or towns. A stuffed name can get a listing flagged or suspended, and it looks desperate to the customers it was meant to impress. Put services in the services section and towns in your service area, where they belong.

Read the whole rewrite out loud before anything goes live. If a sentence does not sound like you on a good day, rewrite it until it does. Nothing is published from this step until you approve the full text.

Done when: category, services, description, attributes, and hours are all rewritten from your profile, the name is your real name only, and you have read the whole thing out loud and approved it.

Step 4: ASK (about 10 minutes to set up, then it runs on every job)

Open templates/review-ask-scripts.md, templates/review-texts.md, and templates/review-link-and-qr.md. Together they install one system with four moments, all pointing to the same [review_link]:

6. **The tech's in-person ask, at the moment the job wraps.** The person who did the work asks, standing there, while the customer is looking at the finished job and is happy with it. The script is short: name what was done, ask plainly for a review, and make it easy, a text with the link is coming, and tapping it takes them straight to the review page. No begging, no script that sounds like a call center. In your voice, from your profile.
7. **The driveway text, when the job wraps.** Before the truck leaves the street, the customer gets a short text: thanks, the job named, and [review_link]. This is the highest-value text in the kit, because the moment is still warm and the link is in their hand.
8. **The day-2 text.** A gentle follow-up for customers who meant to and forgot. Same link, same voice, no guilt and no pressure. Life got busy, the text assumes that, kindly.
9. **The day-7 last ask.** One final, respectful ask, and then it stops. The message says plainly that it is the last one on this job. A system that knows when to stop is a system customers do not learn to dread.

Set up the review link and QR code from the link-and-QR guide: shorten nothing by hand, copy [review_link] from your profile exactly, test it, and put the QR code where it helps, on the invoice, on a card left at the job, in the texts themselves. A QR code is just the review link as a picture a phone camera can open.

Now the hard rule, and it has no exceptions: **the ask goes to EVERY customer, the same way.** Never buy reviews. Never fake them. Never offer anything in exchange for one. And never ask only the happy customers while quietly

skipping the unhappy ones, that is called review gating, it violates Google policy, and it can get a listing hurt, up to losing reviews or worse. It is also just dishonest: a profile built only from filtered praise is not proof, and customers can smell it. Every customer gets the same ask, on the same schedule. Some will leave hard reviews. Step 5 is how you handle those like a professional, and honest replies to hard reviews often sell the next job better than another five stars would.

Done when: the in-person script is printed or saved where your techs will see it, the driveway, day-2, and day-7 texts are loaded with your working [review_link], the QR code is placed, and the every-customer rule is understood by everyone who touches a job.

Step 5: REPLY (about 10 minutes to learn, then minutes per review)

Open templates/review-replies.md and templates/bad-review-playbook.md. The rule is simple: **reply to every review**, the five-star ones, the quiet three-star ones, and the hard ones. Future customers read replies as closely as they read reviews. A reply tells them how this business treats people after the money changes hands, which is exactly what they are trying to learn.

For good reviews, reply with specifics, not a form letter. Name the job, thank them by name where they gave one, and say one true thing about the work. Brightpath replies in a plainspoken, neighborly voice and signs off "The Brightpath crew", your replies sign off your way, from your profile's voice fields. A copied-and-pasted "Thanks for your business!" under forty reviews tells a future customer that nobody is really there. Forty short, real replies tell them somebody is.

For a bad review, follow the playbook and do not improvise. First, cool down, never reply hot, and never reply the same hour if you are angry. Second, acknowledge what the customer said, in their terms, and show they were heard. Third, take it offline: give the phone or email from your profile, for Brightpath, 555-013-4477 and hello@brightpath.example, and invite them to reach out so you can look into it. Fourth, hold the two lines that never move: **no reply ever argues with a reviewer, and no reply ever invents facts about a**

job. If you do not know, say you are looking into it. If a review is genuinely fake, not a customer, wrong business, spam, the playbook shows you how to flag it to Google with a calm, factual report, and then you move on either way. You do not get to decide unilaterally that a hard review from a real customer is fake, and flagging real criticism backfires. One bad review with a calm, professional reply rarely costs a job. An argument underneath it costs many.

Done when: every existing review on your listing has a reply, the bad-review playbook is saved where whoever replies can reach it, and everyone who replies knows the cooldown, acknowledge, take-it-offline rules.

Step 6: PROTECT (about 10 minutes, the keep-it-alive step)

Open templates/suspension-prevention.md, templates/photo-system.md, templates/q-and-a-seeding.md, and templates/google-posts.md. This step has two jobs: keep the listing safe, and keep it from going stale again.

Protection first. Work the suspension prevention checklist line by line: real name only, one listing per real business, address and service-area settings that match how you truly operate, hours and phone that match your website (for Brightpath, https://brightpath.example carries the same facts), no keyword stuffing anywhere, and edits made a few at a time rather than all at once where the checklist says to slow down. Big, sudden changes to name, address, or category are how honest listings get flagged for review by Google. The checklist also covers who has access to the listing and keeping that access list clean. A suspended listing earns nothing while it is down, and reinstatement is slow, prevention is the cheap version of that lesson.

Then the alive system. The photo system: real photos from real jobs, added on a simple rhythm, finished work, the crew working, the truck, the before and after where the customer says yes. Never stock photos presented as your work. The Q&A seeding: list the questions customers in [primary_city] actually ask, price, timing, guarantee, service area, and post honest answers from your profile, in your voice. Never plant fake questions pretending to be customers; seed means you ask and answer openly as the business, which Google allows and customers appreciate. The Google posts: if google_posts_ok in your profile is yes, a short weekly post, a finished job photo, a seasonal reminder, one useful tip, written from your templates, saying only what is true. ClearLine's

posts stay direct with no fluff, because that is ClearLine's voice. Yours match yours.

Done when: the suspension checklist is worked with no line skipped, the photo rhythm is set, your seeded questions and answers are live, and, if posts are OK for you, the first Google post is written and scheduled.

Step 7: VERIFY (about 10 minutes now, then 10 minutes a week)

Never trust a settings screen. Verify on Google itself, the way a customer sees it. Read the live listing back on Google after your edits: search your business, open the listing fresh, and check the category, services, description, attributes, hours, and name against the rewrite you approved, word for word where it matters. Edits can be changed, trimmed, or held for review by Google, the live listing is the only version that counts. Then tap your own [review_link] yourself, on your phone, and follow it all the way to the review page. If it lands anywhere else, fix the link in your profile and everywhere it is used before a single customer sees it. Send test texts only to your own phone, the driveway text, day 2, and day 7, and read each one the way a customer would. Never run a test on a real customer: a "test" text to a homeowner costs more trust than any single fix earns. Every piece of this system also has an off switch: automations can be paused, posts can be removed, and listing edits can be corrected. Flipping something off is always safe.

Then the weekly habit, ten minutes, same time each week. Open templates/review-tracking-log.md and write down, with the date: reviews asked for, reviews received, your count and average rating now, every review replied to, photos added, and the one post that went up. That log is the answer to "is it working?", from records, not feelings. Check it against your Step 1 scorecard once a month. A listing that is complete, reviewed freshly, replied to fully, and photographed regularly is doing everything a listing can honestly do.

Done when: the live listing on Google matches your approved rewrite, your review link lands on the review page when you tap it, all three test texts reached YOUR phone worded right, and your first week is written in the tracking log.

What "working" looks like

Week 1: your listing is complete and verified live, every tech knows the in-person ask, and the first driveway texts go out with a link you have tapped and tested yourself. Month 1: new reviews arrive steadily because every customer is asked the same way, every review, good or hard, carries a real reply, and your count and freshness visibly move in the tracking log. Ongoing: ten minutes a week keeps photos, posts, Q&A, and replies current, the suspension checklist is rechecked whenever anything on the listing changes, and a slow week is a fact in a log, not a mystery. This is a listing and reviews system. Judge it like one: by a complete listing, fresh honest reviews, replies on every one, and a record you can read, never by a ranking nobody honest can promise you.