

Small Business SEO Starter Checklist

What you can do yourself this week, what to watch every month, and what to ask before you pay anybody.

This week: the basics you can do yourself

- ☐ **Verify your site in Google Search Console.** It's free and it's the only place Google tells you which searches you show up for.
- ☐ **Search `site:yourdomain.com` on Google.** If your key service pages aren't listed, nothing else on this list matters yet.
- ☐ **Connect Google Analytics 4** and mark your real conversions: calls, form fills, bookings.
- ☐ **Claim and verify your Google Business Profile.** Pick the right primary category and fill in hours, services and service area.
- ☐ **Give every page its own title tag and meta description.** Lead the title with what the page sells, then your town.
- ☐ **One H1 per page, headings that say something,** and alt text that describes the image.
- ☐ **Have an about page, link your pages to each other, keep the navigation clean.**
- ☐ **Skip the meta keywords tag.** Google doesn't use it, and keyword stuffing breaks Google's spam policies.
- ☐ **Set up a review ask** that goes out automatically after every finished job, with your Google review link in it.

Source for the meta keywords and spam points: Google's SEO Starter Guide, developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/seo-starter-guide

Every month: what to watch, in order

- ☐ **Impressions** in Search Console. They move first. More impressions means Google is testing you for more searches.
- ☐ **Queries.** Are the searches you show up for the ones your customers actually use?
- ☐ **Average position** on the queries that sell. Page two to page one is where clicks start.
- ☐ **Clicks** from those queries.
- ☐ **Calls, forms and booked jobs from organic search** in GA4 and your phone log. This is the number you can feel.

Google's own guide says some changes take effect in hours and others can take several months. Judge the trend over a quarter, not a week.

Who should do what

Task	What it involves	When it shows	Cost	DIY or hire
Search Console + GA4	Verify the site, connect analytics, mark conversions	Data starts the day it's connected	Free	DIY
Google Business Profile	Claim, verify, categories, services, photos	Weeks, after verification	Free	DIY
Titles, descriptions, headings	One clear title and H1 per page	Days to weeks	Free	DIY
Reviews	Automatic ask after each job, reply to every review	Ongoing	Free	DIY
Technical fixes	Redirect chains, speed, structured data, orphaned pages	Weeks to months	Low to medium	Hire for the audit
Citations	Consistent name, address, phone across directories	Weeks to months	Free to low	Either
Content from customer conversations	Pages built from the questions buyers actually ask	Months	Medium	Hire for strategy
Earned links and mentions	Community work, podcasts, local news	Months	Medium	Hire or partner
AI and Bing visibility	Third-party mentions, Bing Webmaster Tools	Months	Low to medium	Hire

Timings are rough on purpose. No reliable source puts hard numbers on them, and anyone who does is guessing.

Before you hire an SEO: ask these

- ☐ Can you show me examples of past work and results?
- ☐ Do you follow Google's Search Essentials?
- ☐ What will you change on my site, and what will you do off it?
- ☐ How long until I should expect to see what, and how will you measure it?
- ☐ How will we communicate, and who will I talk to?
- ☐ Will you give me access to everything, and do I own it if we part ways?

Red flags: a guaranteed #1 ranking (Google says nobody can guarantee one), a "special relationship" with Google, "priority submit", links sold in bulk, a contract that locks you in before you've seen a plan, and reports you need a translator to read.

Source: Google, "Do you need an SEO?", developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/do-i-need-seo

Want a second set of eyes? Book a free 30-minute call and I'll tell you what I'd fix first, even if we don't end up working together. tidycal.com/unscriptedpodcasts/30-minute-meeting · Full guide: jeremyriveraseo.com/seo-basics-for-small-business/