SAILING DIRECTIONS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

# Your Google Business Profile

How to set it up and look after it yourself, from the first search to your hundredth review. In plain English, and free to keep.


**SETTING IT UP**

Checking you're not on there already, making it and proving it's yours

**FILLING IT IN**

Hours, services, the description and photos

**LOOKING AFTER IT**

Reviews, updates, who can get in, and the scam calls

**AT THE BACK**

A fifteen-minute check to do once a month


*Robert*
Tideswell



BEFORE WE START

# Hi, I'm Rob. You can do this one yourself.

A Google Business Profile is free, and for a local business it's often the first thing a customer sees. You don't need a web designer to set one up or to keep it in good shape.

I build websites, tills and software for small businesses in Lincolnshire, and I set these profiles up for clients all the time. There's nothing in it you can't do yourself in an evening, so this guide covers the whole thing: making the profile, proving to Google that it's yours, filling it in properly and looking after it once it's live.

Most of it comes from looking at a lot of local businesses on Google and seeing the same few problems again and again. Opening hours that are wrong over Christmas, photos from years ago, reviews nobody has answered, and profiles stuck in an account that belongs to someone who left. They're all easy to avoid.

THE ONE THING THAT MATTERS MOST

**Keep it true.** Right hours, right phone number, real photos. A customer who turns up to a locked door because Google said you were open probably won't come back, and they might leave a review about it.

**How to use it:** sections 1 to 4 get you set up. Sections 5 to 8 are about looking after it, and section 9 covers the calls you'll start getting once you're live. The checklist at the back is a fifteen-minute routine for once a month.


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01 WHAT IT IS AND WHAT YOU NEED

# The free listing that turns up before your website does

When someone searches your name, or something like "fish and chips Skegness", your Business Profile is the box with your photos, hours, reviews and a Call button. On Google Maps, it's your pin. It's free, and Google never charges for it.

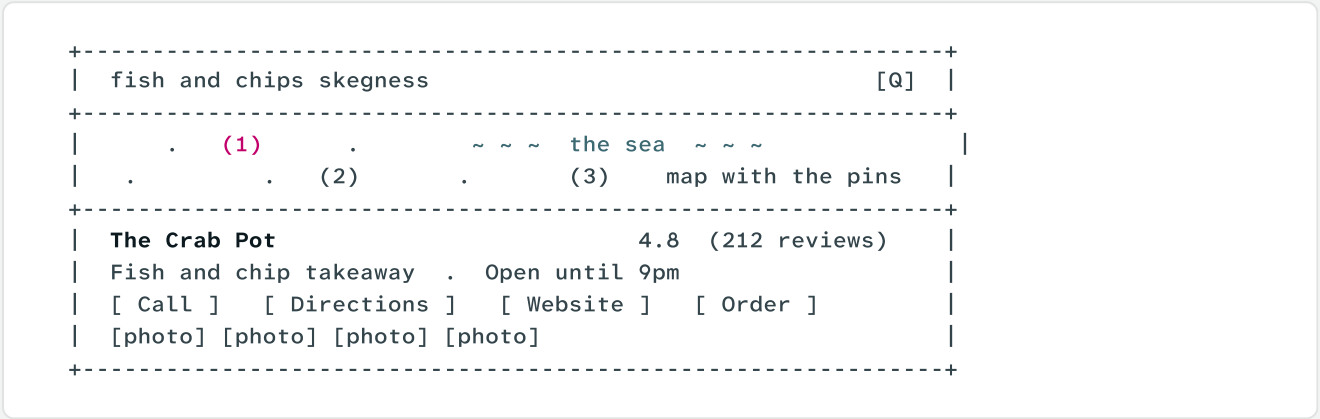



FIG. 1 · ROUGHLY WHAT PEOPLE SEE WHEN THEY SEARCH. YOUR PROFILE IS THE BIT BELOW THE MAP.

## Who can have one

Any business that meets its customers face to face, either at your premises or by going to them. A shop, café, salon, B&B or tradesperson all qualify. A business that only sells online, or only has a PO box or a virtual office, doesn't.

## Have these ready before you start

- **A Google account for the business.** A Gmail made just for it, or your business email address, works best. Avoid a personal account you might lose, or a member of staff's.
- Your business name exactly as it is on your sign, your van or your invoices.
- Your address, or the towns and areas you cover if you go to your customers.
- Your phone number, your website if you have one, and your opening hours.
- Your phone, charged, for the verification video in section 4.
- Ten or so good photos. Section 6 has some tips.

ROCKS AHEAD

A common problem is a profile that belongs to a Gmail address nobody remembers the password for, or to someone who left the business years ago. Getting it back means proving it's yours all over again. Make the account in the business's name, write the login down somewhere safe, and turn on two-step verification on day one.

02 CHECK YOU'RE NOT ON THERE ALREADY

# Look before you make anything

Google sometimes makes a listing for a business by itself, from map data and things people suggest. A previous owner may have made one too. Google doesn't allow two profiles for one business, and a duplicate can get one or both taken down.

01 Open Google Maps and search your business name, then any name you used to trade under. Try your address too.

02 If you find yourself, open the listing and look for **Own this business?** or **Claim this business**. Follow the steps. You'll still need to verify (section 4), but any reviews you already have come with you.

03 If Google says someone else already manages it, choose **Request access**. Google emails the current owner. If they don't reply, you may be offered a way to claim it yourself.

03 MAKING THE PROFILE

## Then make your own

Go to `business.google.com/create` and sign in with the business's Google account. Google asks a few questions, one at a time. Here's what to put.

| QUESTION | WHAT TO PUT |
|---|---|
| **Business name** | Exactly what's on your sign. Nothing added. |
| **Category** | The most specific one that fits, such as "Fish and chip takeaway" over "Restaurant". Google asks you to use as few as possible, so start with one and add more only if they describe what the business is. |
| **Location** | Your address, if customers come to you. If you go to them, like a plumber, a cleaner or a mobile hairdresser, say no and add the towns or areas you cover. Your home address then stays hidden. A PO box or virtual office won't be accepted. |
| **Both** | If you have premises and travel to customers too, show the address and add a service area. Google expects the premises to be staffed during your opening hours. |
| **Phone and website** | A number that's answered when you're open. If you haven't got a website yet, leave it blank and add it later. |

■ ROCKS AHEAD: THE NAME

It's tempting to call yourself "The Crab Pot · Best Fish and Chips in Skegness". Don't. Google's rules say the name must match the real world, with no extra keywords, places, slogans or phone numbers. Profiles that stuff the name get suspended, and other businesses do report them.

04 PROVING IT'S YOURS

# Prove to Google it's really your business

Before your profile goes public, Google checks that you run the business. Google picks the method, and these days it usually asks for a short video. It sounds worse than it is.

## Filming the video

Google gives you the option on your phone and you record it there and then, in one take. You can't upload a clip you made earlier, or pause and edit it. A minute or two is about right.

### Show

- **Where you are:** the street, your sign, or the businesses either side.
- **Your work:** inside the shop or kitchen, your tools, your stock, your van.
- **That you're in charge:** unlocking the door, opening the till, or a bill or invoice in the business's name with the account numbers covered.

### Don't show

- Customers' or staff's faces.
- Bank details, card numbers or ID.
- Stopping and starting. Keep filming in one go, even if you fumble the keys.

PLAN THE ROUTE BEFORE YOU PRESS RECORD

Start on the street, so the road shows. Film the sign close enough to read, unlock the door, walk through, and finish behind the counter. Do it on good Wi-Fi or a strong signal, and don't switch between them while it uploads.

## Other ways it might ask

Sometimes Google offers a phone call, a text or an email with a code instead, and now and then a postcard. Any of these is fine. Use whichever it gives you.

## How long it takes

Usually a few days. Google says it can take up to five working days. Don't change the name, address or category while you wait, because it can start the check again.

If it's turned down, don't worry. It happens a lot, usually because the video didn't show enough. Google lets you try again. Make sure the sign, the inside and something only the owner could do are all clearly in the shot.

BE WARY OF

Anyone who rings offering to "verify your listing" for a fee. Verifying is free and only you can do it. Section 9 has more on the calls you'll start getting.

05 FILLING IT IN PROPERLY

# Fill in every box, and keep it true

Once you're verified, search your business name on Google while you're signed in, and your profile's tools appear above it. On a phone, the Google Maps app has them too. Google says complete profiles are easier to match with the right searches, and every answer on there is a phone call you don't have to take.

| WHAT | TIPS |
|---|---|
| **Opening hours** | Your normal week. If you work by appointment only, you can leave them off. |
| **Special hours** | Bank holidays, Christmas, a week off. Set them in advance. Google often reminds you before a bank holiday, so it's a two-minute job. |
| **Description** | Up to 750 characters. Say what you do and where in the first line, the way you'd tell a customer. No web links, and no shouting about offers. |
| **Services or menu** | Each thing you do, with a price or a "from" price where you can. People compare. |
| **Products** | Useful for shops: a photo, a name and a price for your best sellers. |
| **Attributes** | Wheelchair access, dog-friendly, parking, card payments and so on. Tick what's true. |
| **Links** | A booking or ordering link if you have one, and your social media pages. |
| **Logo and cover photo** | Your logo, and a cover photo that shows the place or the work at its best. |

## Write the description the way you talk

BEFORE

Welcome to The Crab Pot! We are passionate about quality and pride ourselves on our excellent customer service.

AFTER

Family-run fish and chip shop on Skegness seafront since 1985. Eat in or take away, with gluten-free fish on Tuesdays and a dog-friendly terrace.

## Changes you didn't make

Anyone can suggest a change to your profile, and Google sometimes accepts one without asking you. Most suggestions are honest, but not all. Google lets you know when something has been changed, so open those emails and check. If an update is wrong, change it back.

06 PHOTOS

# Real photos, and new ones every so often

People look at the photos before they read anything. A dozen real, recent photos make a business look open and cared for. A single blurry logo makes people wonder.

## What to add

- The outside, so people recognise it when they arrive.
- Inside, from the door, the way a customer first sees it.
- Your best work, dishes or products.
- You and your team, if everyone's happy to be in them.
- Your van, if you go to your customers.

## Taking them

- Daylight, lights on, lens wiped.
- Tidy first. Bins, boxes and cables out of shot.
- Landscape for most of them, and a square logo.
- No text, borders or logos stamped on top.
- For food, shoot by a window from slightly above.

## What Google accepts

| | |
|---|---|
| PHOTOS | JPG or PNG, between 10 KB and 5 MB. Best at 720 by 720 pixels or larger, and at least 250 by 250. |
| VIDEOS | Up to 30 seconds and 75 MB, at 720p or better. |

Photos only show on Google once your profile is verified.

## Customers' photos

Customers can add photos too, and theirs often show up first. You can't delete them, but you can report one that's offensive, off-topic or of somewhere else. The best answer is plenty of good photos of your own, added every month or two.

**ROCKS AHEAD: OTHER PEOPLE'S PHOTOS**

Only upload photos you took or have permission to use. Photos lifted from the internet, a supplier's website included, can bring a bill from the copyright owner and break Google's rules.

**A QUICK WIN**

Take ten photos this week, on a bright day, and add them all at once. Then add one or two every month after that. It's the easiest way to make the profile look alive.

07 REVIEWS

# Ask for reviews, and answer every one

Reviews are what most people read first, and Google says the number and the score both count when it decides who to show. You'll get far more if you ask, and a link makes it easy.

## Getting your review link

On a computer, search your business name while you're signed in, open your reviews and choose **Get more reviews**. Copy the short link, or download the QR code. Google only makes the QR code on a computer.

## Asking

- Ask on the day, while it's fresh.
- Put the QR code by the till, on receipts or on the back of the invoice.
- Add the link to your thank-you emails and texts.
- Ask everyone. Google's rules ban asking only the happy ones.

**THE LAW ON REVIEWS**

Since 6 April 2025, UK law bans fake reviews outright. That covers writing your own, getting friends or staff to write them, buying them, swapping them with another business and hiding genuine bad ones. Google's own rules also ban giving anything in return for a review, even a discount or a free coffee. The Competition and Markets Authority can now fine businesses directly.

## Replying

Reply to every review, good or bad. People read the replies as closely as the reviews. For a good one, thank them by name and keep it short. For a bad one, wait until you're calm, say sorry they were disappointed and give them a way to talk to you directly. Don't argue the details in public, and never post anything about them they didn't share themselves.

**A REPLY THAT MAKES IT WORSE**

That's not true. We were busy and you were rude to my staff. Maybe try somewhere else next time.

**A REPLY THAT WORKS**

Thanks for telling us, Sarah, and I'm sorry your chips were cold on Saturday. That's not what we aim for. Please give me a ring on the number above and I'll put it right.

## Fake or unfair reviews

If a review breaks Google's rules (spam, abuse, the wrong business, or clearly fake), report it with Google's Manage reviews tool, where you can follow its progress. A genuine review that's just negative won't be taken down, so reply to it instead.

08 KEEPING IT UP TO DATE

# Ten minutes a fortnight keeps it working

A profile that's been left alone for a year looks closed, even when you're not. A little and often is all it needs.

## Posting updates

From your profile, choose **Add update** (on a computer it may sit under Promote). There are three kinds: a plain update, an offer with dates and terms, and an event with a start and end. Add a good photo and a button, such as Book or Call. Offers and events stay up until their end date.

- A job you've just finished, with before and after photos (ask the customer first).
- This week's special, or something new in the shop.
- Different hours over a holiday, or a week off.
- An event, like a tasting night or a stall at a show.

## Questions people ask

Google used to let anyone ask a question on your profile. In many places it has been replacing that with answers its AI writes from your profile, your website and your reviews. You can't edit those answers directly, so keep your details, services and website accurate and complete.

## See what's working

**Performance** shows how many people saw your profile, and how many called, asked for directions or clicked through to your website. Look once a month. If the calls drop after you changed something, you'll spot it.

## When things change

- **Moving:** change the address. Google may ask you to verify again.
- **Closed for the winter:** mark the business as temporarily closed, then put your hours back when you reopen. That's what Google's rules ask seasonal businesses to do.
- **New phone number or website:** change it here the same day.
- **Closing for good:** mark it as permanently closed, so people searching for you find out.

WHILE YOU'RE AT IT

**Apple Business** (for Apple Maps on iPhones) and **Bing Places** are free too. Bing can copy your Google profile across in a few clicks, so people who use Apple Maps or Bing can find you too.

09 WHO CAN GET IN, AND THE SCAM CALLS

# Keep hold of the keys, and ignore the callers

More than one person can look after your profile, each signing in with their own Google account. Never share your password, with staff or with anyone who offers to help.

| ROLE | WHAT THEY CAN DO |
|---|---|
| **Primary owner** | Everything, including handing the profile to someone else. There's only ever one, and it should be you. |
| **Owner** | Nearly everything, including adding and removing people and deleting the profile. |
| **Manager** | Edit the details, post updates, add photos and reply to reviews. Can't add or remove people. |

To add someone, open your profile's menu (the three dots), then **Business Profile settings**, then **People and access**, then **Add**. New people wait seven days before they can do everything.

- If someone manages it for you, a web designer included, make them a Manager. You stay the primary owner.
- Take people off when they leave.
- Turn on two-step verification on the Google account, and keep its recovery phone number and email current.

## The scam calls

Once you're live, the calls start. They sound official and they're often a recorded voice. The usual lines are that your listing is about to be deleted, that it isn't verified, or that you're not showing on Google and they can fix it for a fee.

- **Google never charges** to make, verify or keep a Business Profile.
- **Never read out a code** Google has sent you to anyone who calls. That code is how a stranger takes your profile over.
- Ignore offers to remove bad reviews for a fee, or to sell you good ones.
- If you're unsure, hang up and open your profile yourself. If there's a real problem, Google shows it there.

BE WARY OF

Anyone promising "the top of Google Maps" or "page one". Nobody can promise that, and Google says there's no way to request or pay for a better local ranking.

10 THE MONTHLY CHECK

# Fifteen minutes, once a month

Print this page or keep it on your phone. If every box gets a tick, your profile is ahead of most of the businesses around you.

## Every month

- [ ] Search your business name on your phone and look at it as a customer would
- [ ] Hours, phone number and website are all right
- [ ] No changes from Google or the public that you didn't make
- [ ] Every new review has a reply
- [ ] One or two new photos added
- [ ] An update or offer posted
- [ ] Calls, directions and clicks noted from Performance

## Before every bank holiday

- [ ] Special hours set, or confirmed as normal

## Once a year

- [ ] Everyone who has access still needs it
- [ ] You're still the primary owner
- [ ] The Google account's recovery phone and email are current
- [ ] Two-step verification is on
- [ ] Description, services and prices read through and updated
- [ ] Cover photo and logo still look their best
- [ ] Apple Business and Bing Places match

## Whenever something changes

- [ ] New address, phone, website or hours changed the same day
- [ ] Closed for the season marked as temporarily closed

## Your first month

WEEK 1

### Start asking

Put the review QR code by the till and the link in your emails. Ask every customer this week, and reply to each review.

WEEK 2

### Add the photos

Ten good ones in daylight, then your first update with one of them and a button.

WEEK 4

### Look at the numbers

Open Performance. See how people found you and what they searched, and use their words in your description.

IF YOU GET STUCK

# Write to me. A quick question is free, and you don't need to be hiring me.

If Google's doing something odd, or a button isn't where this guide says (Google moves them now and then), send me an email. It's just me here, so the reply comes from me.

robert@tideswell.dev tideswell.dev

And if you'd rather someone set it up for you, I do that too, alongside websites for small businesses here in Lincolnshire.

WEBSITES

### Web design

Built for phones first, set up for Google, and easy to update yourself. Online shops and bookings too.

TILLS

### EPOS and tills

A till that handles your stock, use-by dates, rota and cash-up as well. No monthly fee.

SOFTWARE

### Custom software

Swap the spreadsheets and paper forms for one system the whole team can use.

Good luck with it. I hope it brings you plenty of calls and new faces through the door.

Feel free to pass this guide on to anyone it might help. Edition 1, October 2026. Google's rules and buttons were checked in October 2026, but they change, so if something looks different, Google's own help pages have the latest. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Google, Google Maps and Google Business Profile are trademarks of Google LLC. This guide isn't made by or connected with Google.

Tideswell has no tide. It's a village in the Peak District, nowhere near the sea, and the name means *Tidi's well*. There is a well, as far as anyone knows.

*Robert*

**Tideswell**

FL(2) 5S

