



VICTORY ENTREPRENEURSHIP CONSORTIUM · SESSION 04 · MARKETING AND BRANDING IN THE AI AGE

Google Business Profile Quick Start

Claim, verify, and optimize your free Google listing in about one hour.

Why this hour matters

When someone near you searches for what you do, Google shows a map with three businesses before it shows any website. Your Google Business Profile is how you get into that map.

It is completely free. Most of your competitors set theirs up once and abandoned it. A complete, active profile routinely beats a bigger company's neglected one.

Businesses do not need a website for this to work. The profile alone can take calls, messages, and booking clicks.

What you will do, in order: claim it, verify it, complete it, then keep it alive with 15 minutes a month.

Rick and Isabella Piña · VCMI Virginia · August 17, 2026

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Before You Start · Gather These (15 minutes)

- ☐ **A Google account.** Use the email you want to run the business from. If you have a business Gmail, use that one, not a personal one you share.
- ☐ **Your exact business name.** The legal or trade name you use everywhere. Do not stuff in extra words like “Best Plumber Woodbridge”; Google suspends profiles for that.
- ☐ **Address and service area.** Storefront: your street address. Home-based: you can hide the address and list the towns and counties you serve instead.
- ☐ **One phone number and your hours.** The number you actually answer. Real hours, including the days you are closed.
- ☐ **Your positioning sentence.** The one-sentence description you wrote tonight in the workbook. You will paste it into the profile description.
- ☐ **Ten real photos on your phone.** Your work, your space, your team, your face. No stock photos. Phone photos in good light are perfect.
- ☐ **Your booking or contact link.** A booking page, order page, or contact form if you have one. If not, skip it; the call button still works.

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Claim Your Listing (10 minutes)

- ☐ **Go to google.com/business.** Sign in with your business Google account and select “Manage now.”
- ☐ **Search for your business name.** Google may already have a listing customers created through reviews and map suggestions.
- ☐ **If your business appears,** select it and choose “Claim” or “Manage now.” Do NOT create a second listing; duplicates hurt your ranking.
- ☐ **If it does not appear,** choose “Add your business,” then enter the name and pick your business type: storefront, service business, or both.
- ☐ **If someone else already claimed it,** Google shows part of the owner’s email. If it is an old employee or a marketing company you fired, use “Request access.” They have 3 days to respond before Google lets you appeal.

TIP: Do this on a computer, not your phone, the first time. The screens are easier to follow and you can copy-paste from your workbook.

2 Verify It (5 minutes now, then wait)

- ☐ **Pick a verification method.** Google decides which it offers you: video recording, phone call, text, email, or a postcard mailed to your address (5 to 14 days).
- ☐ **If offered video,** take it. It is the fastest. You walk through your workspace on camera showing signage, equipment, or work in progress.
- ☐ **Enter the code the moment it arrives.** Codes expire. If the postcard never comes, request a new one; after two failures the video option usually appears.
- ☐ **Until verified, keep going.** You can complete the whole profile while you wait. It just will not show publicly until the code goes in.

3 Complete Every Field (20 minutes)

- ☐ **Name, address, phone, hours.** Enter them EXACTLY as they appear on your website, Facebook page, and anywhere else. Consistency is a ranking factor; mismatches confuse Google and cost you position.
- ☐ **Primary category.** This single choice decides which searches you appear in. Be specific: “Family restaurant,” not “Restaurant.” Type slowly and read every suggestion before picking. Add 2 or 3 secondary categories only if they truly apply.
- ☐ **Description.** Paste your positioning sentence first, then two or three plain sentences about who you serve and what makes you different. You get 750 characters; the first 250 show without tapping “more,” so front-load.
- ☐ **Services or products.** List each service with a short description and a price or starting price. Every service you list is another search you can match.
- ☐ **Attributes.** Check everything that applies: veteran-owned, women-owned, Black-owned, wheelchair accessible, free estimates. These show as badges on your listing.

TIP: Google scores profile completeness. A 100% complete profile with 10 photos outranks a half-finished one almost every time. Do not stop at name and phone.

4 Add Ten Real Photos (10 minutes)

- ☐ **Your logo and a cover photo.** The cover is the big image people see first. Use your best real photo, not a graphic with text on it.
- ☐ **At least five photos of your work.** Finished jobs, plated food, completed projects, before-and-afters. This is what convinces strangers.
- ☐ **Your space and your face.** The storefront or workspace, and you or your team. People buy from people; profiles with faces get more calls.

- ☐ **No stock photography, ever.** Google can detect it and customers can feel it. A slightly imperfect real photo beats a perfect fake one.
- ☐ **Your action button link.** In the profile menu, add your booking, ordering, or appointment link so the listing gets a “Book online” style button.

5 Keep It Alive (15 minutes a month)

- ☐ **Post once a month, minimum.** An offer, a finished job, a tip, an event. A listing with a post from this month reads as an open, active business. Use tonight’s AI content prompts; one of your weekly posts can double as your Google post.
- ☐ **Respond to EVERY review.** Good ones get a two-sentence thank you naming the service. Bad ones get a calm, human reply and an offer to make it right, because you are writing for the hundred strangers reading it, not the one reviewer.
- ☐ **Ask for reviews weekly.** Use the review link inside your profile (Ask for reviews) and the request script from tonight’s session. Three asks a week, every week.
- ☐ **Check your numbers monthly.** The Performance tab shows calls, direction requests, and website clicks. Those are three of the five numbers on your tracking sheet.

THE DEAL: If you do nothing else this month, finish Steps 1 through 4. One hour, once. Then Step 5 is 15 minutes a month forever.

6 If Something Goes Wrong

- ☐ **“Verification code never arrived.”** Request a new code. After two failed postcards, the video method usually unlocks. Do not create a new listing.
- ☐ **“There are two listings for my business.”** Claim yours, then report the duplicate: on the duplicate listing choose “Suggest an edit” then “Close or remove.”
- ☐ **“My profile got suspended.”** Usually a name stuffed with keywords, a virtual office address, or too many edits at once. Fix the violation first, then appeal in the profile help center. Appeals with the violation still present get denied.
- ☐ **“A bad review is unfair or fake.”** Reply calmly first, then report it (three dots next to the review). Google removes policy violations, not opinions, so your public reply is the real defense.
- ☐ **“I am stuck on something else.”** Ask the VCMI AI Business Mentor at bit.ly/VCMIBusinessAiMentor and it will walk you through your exact screen.