



attorney near me



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4.9 (312 reviews)

#1
on the map

GET FOUND. GET CHOSEN.

The Law Firm's Guide to Winning
Local Search in 2026

Maps | Search | AI Answers | Local Services Ads | Reviews

DARIN SWAYNE



AdvantageAttorney®

Get Found. Get Chosen.

The Law Firm's Guide to Winning Local Search in 2026

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The research findings, platform features, and statistics described in this book are current as of July 2026 and are subject to change as platforms evolve. This book provides marketing education and general business information. It does not provide legal advice, and the attorneys reading it will recognize that sentence as the correct one to include.

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A Note From the Author

Somewhere in your city, right now, a person with a legal problem is holding a phone. Maybe it is 10:47 p.m. and they just got served. Maybe the wage garnishment notice is sitting on the kitchen table. They are not flipping through a phone book, because it is 2026 and the phone book is a booster seat. They are typing "bankruptcy attorney near me" into Google, and in the next ten seconds an algorithm will decide which three firms exist and which several dozen do not.

This book is about winning those ten seconds. On the map. In the regular results. In the AI answers that increasingly skip both. And then, once you are seen, winning the choice itself.

You do not need a technical bone in your body to use it. Everything is in plain English, every recommendation ends in an action, and none of it is guesswork. The backbone is a 2026 study in which 47 of the sharpest local search practitioners on the planet scored 187 individual ranking factors, built on years of watching real rankings move at thousands of real businesses. I have layered in Google's own published playbook for Business Profiles, the click paths, the limits, the statistics Google publishes about its own platform, and then translated the whole pile for the people I know best: lawyers.

How to read it: chapters 1 through 3 teach you the game. Chapters 4 and 5 are the hands-on part; open your Google Business Profile in another tab and fix things as you go. The rest of the book turns a correct profile into a dominant one, and the appendices hand your team three checklists so nothing lives in anyone's head. If you get halfway through and think "this is a lot, and I have depositions," that is exactly why my company exists. Either way, you now hold the whole playbook. Nothing held back.

Darin Swayne

Founder, Advantage Attorney Marketing

Quick Topic Finder

Alphabetical, so you can jump straight to the thing that is on fire today.

Topic	Where to find it	Topic	Where to find it
Address and map pin	Chapter 5	Local Services Ads (Google Screened)	Chapter 13
AI answers and ChatGPT visibility	Chapter 12	Managers and profile access	Chapter 4
Attributes	Chapter 5	Map pin placement	Chapter 5
Best-of lists	Chapters 10, 12	Myths (what to skip)	Chapter 15
Booking and consultation links	Chapter 5	Name field rules and DBAs	Chapter 5
Business description	Chapter 5	Negative ranking factors	Chapter 16
Business hours strategy	Chapters 3, 5	Photos and videos	Chapter 5
Categories (primary and secondary)	Chapter 5	Posts on Google	Chapter 5
Chat and text messaging on GBP	Chapter 5	Practice area pages	Chapter 7
Citations and directories	Chapter 10	Proximity and distance	Chapter 2
Claiming a profile someone else controls	Chapter 4	Q&A section	Chapter 5
Conversion (getting chosen)	Chapter 14	Review machine (getting reviews)	Chapter 6
Documentation to gather first	Appendix A	Review responses and QR codes	Chapter 6
Duplicate listings	Chapters 4, 16	Service areas	Chapter 5
Fake reviews and review gating	Chapters 6, 17	Services section	Chapter 5
Filter, the (co-located firms)	Chapters 5, 16	Social media links	Chapters 5, 11
Hacked website	Chapters 16, 17	Suspensions and reinstatement	Chapter 17
Holiday and special hours	Chapter 5	Title tags	Chapters 3, 7
Keyword stuffing	Chapters 5, 15, 16	Verification (including video)	Chapter 4
Links and authority	Chapter 8	Website essentials	Chapter 7
Rank tracking, measurement	Chapter 19	90-day plan	Chapter 18

Chapter 1: How Potential Clients Actually Find You

Legal clients do not browse. They search, they skim, they call. Nearly half of all Google searches carry local intent, and legal searches sit among the most expensive clicks on the entire internet for a reason: each one is a person with a problem and a budget, actively hunting for the professional who will solve it. The firms that show up get the calls. The firms that do not show up have, as far as that searcher is concerned, never existed.

The past two years rearranged the furniture. AI chatbots started answering questions directly, and websites built on "What Is Probate?" articles watched their traffic fall off a cliff. Local search shrugged it off. When a human needs a nearby attorney, Google's local results are still the fastest route from panic to phone call, so that is still where the clients are. Meanwhile, the AI tools have started making local recommendations of their own, which means the smart play is to win today's results while quietly building for tomorrow's. This book does both, and it starts by mapping the battlefield, because there are four separate places a potential client can find your firm, and each runs on its own physics.

1. The map results (the "local pack")

The map with three firms under it, sitting near the top of the page like the podium at the Olympics. It shows your stars, your hours, and your location before anyone reads a word of your website. Rankings here run on your Google Business Profile, your reviews, and how close you are to the searcher. Most of this book's early chapters live here, because this is where most of the money is.

2. The regular website results

The classic links below the map, and a completely different sport. Down here, your Google profile barely matters; your website's content and the sites linking to it decide almost everything. A firm can own the map and be a ghost in the regular results, or vice versa. The winners hold both.

3. AI answers

Ask ChatGPT or Google's AI "who is the best family lawyer in Scottsdale" and it names names. For the first time ever, the research behind this book scored every factor for its effect on AI recommendations, and the results reshuffle the deck in ways nobody's 2023 playbook predicted. Chapter 12 has the full story.

4. Local Services Ads (the "Google Screened" listings)

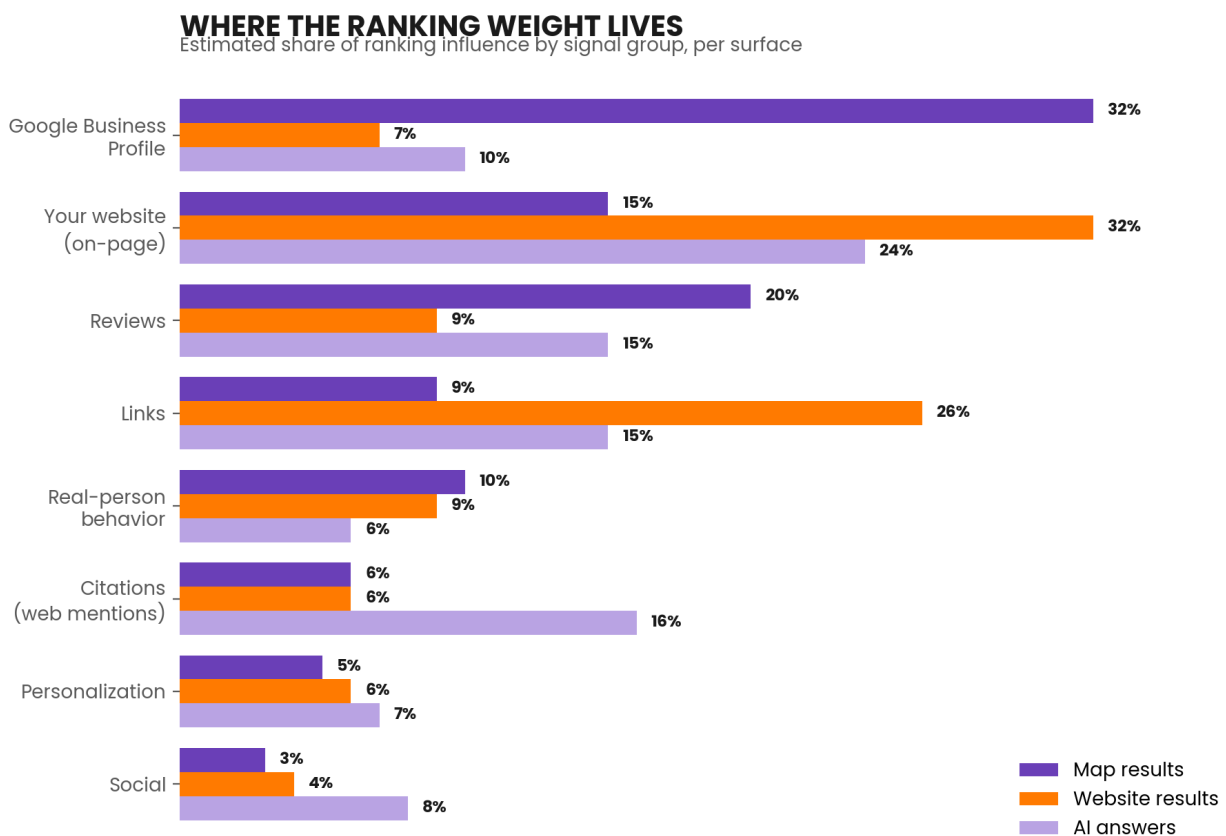
In legal, a row of ad listings with headshots and green Google Screened checkmarks sits above everything, collecting clicks like a toll booth. They charge per lead, not per click, and they run on their own 16-factor ranking system. Here is the number that should get your attention: some firms ranking #1 in both the map and the regular results still take the majority of their new cases through these ads. If they run in your practice areas, they are not optional. Chapter 13 covers the whole system.

The fifth battleground: getting chosen. Visibility puts you on the shelf; it does not put you in the cart. Two firms sit side by side on the map, and the one with the 4.8 rating, the review from last Tuesday, the real photos, and the correct hours takes the client almost every time. Chapter 14 is entirely about that final, decisive step.

Chapter 2: How Google Picks the Winners

Strip away the mystique and Google's local algorithm asks three questions. **Relevance:** does this firm do what the searcher needs? **Distance:** how close is it? **Prominence:** does the wider world seem to know and trust it? Every one of the 187 factors in the research feeds one of those three questions. That is the whole machine. The rest is detail, and the detail is where the money hides.

In practice, the signals sort into eight groups. The researchers asked their 47 practitioners to estimate how much weight each group carries, separately for the map, the regular results, and AI answers. The chart below is the strategic heart of this entire book. Read it like a treasure map, because the three columns tell you exactly where to invest depending on which battlefield you need to win.



Three plot twists jump out. First, **your Google Business Profile owns the map** at roughly a third of all weight, yet barely registers in the regular results, so a gorgeous profile bolted to a weak website is a sports car with no engine. Second, **your website and your links own the regular results**, carrying nearly 60% of that weight between them. Third, and strangest of all, **citations matter almost three times as much for AI answers as for the map**. The humble directory listing, declared dead at approximately fourteen SEO conferences, has been resurrected by machines that decide whom to recommend by reading what the entire web says about you.

The factor you cannot move: distance

One more piece of physics before we start turning dials. The distance between your office and the searcher is the #2 individual factor out of all 187, and your distance to the center of the searched city ranks #12. You cannot optimize the searcher's location, which is why your rankings look magnificent from your own desk and mysteriously terrible from across town. What you can do: measure honestly with a tool that checks rankings from dozens of points around your market, out-earn nearby competitors with the prominence signals this book teaches (it happens constantly), and when a market truly matters, open a real office in it, because an address inside the searched city is the #4 factor overall. What never works is faking it. The suspension list in chapter 17 is full of virtual offices.

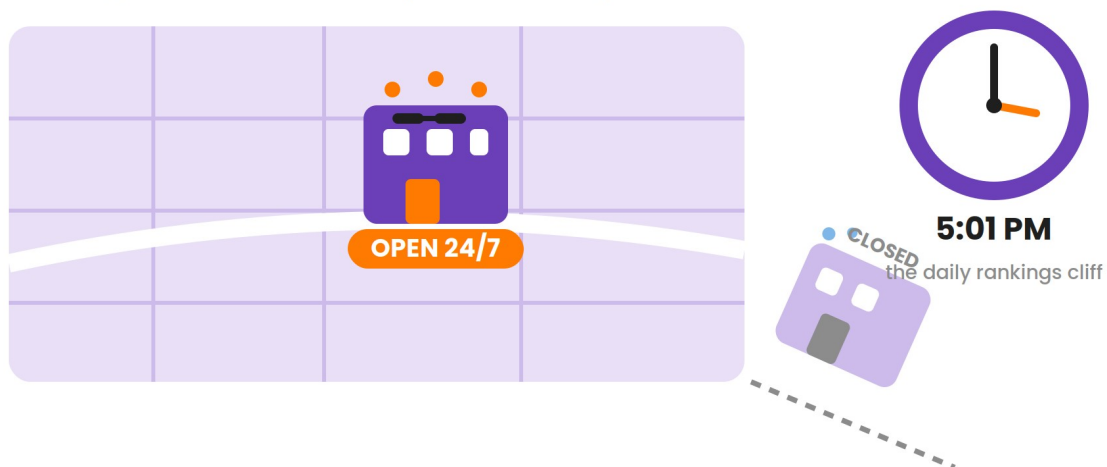
Chapter 3: What Changed in 2026

Most of this book will age well. This chapter is the part your last marketing vendor probably has not read yet. Seven findings separate the current playbook from the 2023 edition, and the first one is the strangest.

1. Your listed hours are now a top-5 ranking factor

Whether your firm shows as open at the exact moment someone searches has rocketed to #5 out of 187. This is watchable in real time, like a nature documentary: a firm holding #1 all afternoon starts sliding around 4 p.m., and at 5:01 it vanishes below competitors whose listings still say open. Google has decided searchers deserve businesses they can reach right now, and it enforces that opinion hourly.

Google at one minute past closing time



For law firms this is somewhere between unfair and expensive, because legal panic does not keep office hours. People research attorneys at 10 p.m., on Sunday, from hospital waiting rooms. The legitimate responses: extend the hours you genuinely keep, or put real coverage behind the phone (a professional answering service or a well-built AI receptionist) so your listed hours can honestly say the firm is reachable around the clock. The illegitimate response is listing hours nobody keeps at an office where a client might physically show up, which manufactures angry visitors, one-star reviews, and a guidelines violation in a single move. Google's own guidance agrees, for what it is worth: 96% of customers are more likely to visit a business that displays its hours, and holiday hours left stale are a trust grenade with a slow fuse.

2. Review freshness beats review history

Reviews now carry roughly a fifth of all map weight, the fastest-growing share of any group, and the star of the category is freshness. How recent your latest review is, and whether reviews arrive in a steady stream instead of occasional bursts, both rank inside the overall top 15. That wall of glowing reviews from 2023? Google reads it exactly the way a potential client does: as evidence of a firm that peaked in 2023. Chapter 6 builds you the machine that fixes this permanently.

3. Google is grading you on what real humans do

Clicks on your listing, photo scrolling, direction requests, taps on the call button, even foot traffic your visitors' phones quietly report: all of it keeps gaining ranking weight. There is even evidence of a real-time effect where a business busier than usual ranks higher at that moment, which means your rankings now have a pulse. You cannot fake any of this (the people selling fake clicks are lying to you), but chapter 9 shows how to earn it.

4. The Services section actually moves rankings now

For years, the Services checkboxes on your profile were treated as decoration, like the fine china of local SEO. Recent testing confirmed they influence rankings: the section sits at #22 overall, with keyword-relevant service names close behind. Google's own data adds that one in three customers checks a business's offerings before choosing. Filling this section out completely takes an hour and is one of the cheapest wins in this entire book. Most of your competitors have never opened it.

5. Directory listings rose from the dead

Citations (your firm's listings and mentions across the web) spent a decade fading into irrelevance, and then AI search performed a resurrection. Three of the top five AI visibility factors are citation factors, because AI systems decide whom to recommend by reading the web's collective account of you: legal directories, best-of lists, news mentions, review platforms. In AI search, mentions are the new links. Chapter 10 has the playbook.

6. Shorter, clearer content wins now

The factor measuring sheer volume of page content fell 40 positions, which is the research politely announcing that the 3,000-word padded page is dead. What wins in 2026 is concise, confident writing that answers the question immediately, organized under clear headings with bullets and no throat-clearing. Humans skim. AI systems parse structure. Both reward you for respecting their time, and scannable structure is now a top-10 AI visibility factor in its own right.

7. The 60-character title tag rule is officially a myth

The commandment that page titles must stay under 60 characters scored near the very bottom of all 187 factors. That limit was invented by SEO software based on what fits on a results page, not on anything Google measures. Long, keyword-rich titles rank fine. The actual rule: put the compelling, human-facing phrasing at the front where searchers see it, and let the extra relevant terms ride in the back seat.

Chapter 4: Own the Profile Before You Polish It

Before a single optimization, settle the boring question that ruins more firms than any algorithm: who actually controls your Google Business Profile? If the answer involves a marketing agency you fired in 2022 or a paralegal who moved to Denver, this chapter is your first priority. Everything else in this book assumes you hold the keys.

Claim it, do not clone it

Search your firm's name on Google. If a profile already exists (Google frequently creates them from public data), claim it through the "Own this business?" link rather than creating a fresh one, because duplicate listings are a documented negative factor and a genuinely annoying cleanup job. If someone else controls the existing profile, a past employee, an old agency, a mystery, you can request ownership: go to business.google.com/add, enter your firm's name and address, choose it from the list, select Request Access, and fill out the form. The current owner gets notified and a countdown starts. Firms recover profiles this way constantly; it just takes a little patience and a lot less patience than living without your own listing.

Verification: Google wants proof you are real

To edit anything, you must verify. Google assigns the verification method automatically based on your category, and video verification is now the common path for law firms. Treat it like the world's lowest-stakes court appearance and come prepared with exhibits. The video needs to show three things: your business name on a permanent fixture (signage on the wall, door, or window; a paper taped to the door will be denied with prejudice), the surrounding area (street signs, neighboring businesses, recognizable landmarks proving you are where you claim), and proof you are authorized (opening the locked entrance with your own key, stepping into staff-only areas, sitting down at the desk like you own the place, because you do). Review takes up to five business days, and if the video is rejected, Google now tells you exactly why and what to fix. Appendix A lists everything to have ready before you press record.

Add a second keyholder today

Here is a horror story every agency has heard: the only person with access to the profile leaves the firm, and suddenly nobody can update hours, answer reviews, or fix the phone number while clients fume in the reviews section. The fix takes two minutes. Go to Business Profile settings, then People and access, then Add, enter an email, choose Owner or Manager, and send the invite. Have at least two current people with access, always.

Then read the fine print on your own safety net, because access is also a liability. The research ranks "association with a suspended Google account" as the #2 suspension risk on the entire list, meaning a compromised or misbehaving account that touches your profile can drag your profile down with it. Audit the access list quarterly, remove departed staff and former vendors the day they leave, and never let an agency make itself the primary owner of your profile. You own the firm; you own the profile. Agencies get Manager access and a firm handshake.

When something breaks

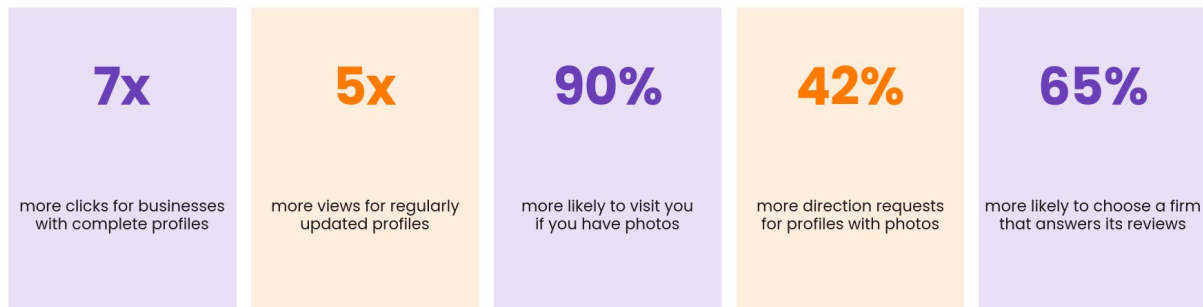
Google maintains direct escalation paths for the common disasters. Bookmark the pattern now so nobody panic-googles during an actual emergency:

The problem	The move
Lost access to the profile login	File a support ticket through the Business Profile help center; the request-access flow above also applies.
Duplicate listing appeared	Report it through support for merging or removal. Do not try to out-optimize your own twin.
Profile suspended	File a reinstatement request with documentation (see chapter 17). Do not create a new profile; that compounds the violation.
Profile hacked or hijacked	File a ticket immediately and lock down the Google account with two-factor authentication.
Wrong phone number showing	Fix it in the profile; if it will not stick, file a ticket, and check chapter 10 for the citation cleanup that usually explains it.
Fake or malicious reviews	Flag through the profile's review tools. Reporting does not guarantee removal, so pair every flag with a calm owner response for the humans reading along.
Review extortion (pay us or the one-stars continue)	Google has a dedicated reporting channel for extortion. Use it, keep the receipts, and do not pay.

Chapter 5: The Profile, Field by Field

Your Google Business Profile carries roughly a third of all map ranking weight, and eight of the top ten individual factors live inside it. Google's own data says complete profiles get 7x more clicks and that customers are 29% more likely to hire a business with a detailed one. Translation: this chapter is the highest-paying hour-per-hour work in local marketing. Open your profile in another tab and let's go field by field, in the order that matters.

GOOGLE'S OWN NUMBERS ON PROFILE COMPLETENESS



The name field (step away from the keywords)

The rule is short: the name field contains your real-world firm name, exactly as it appears on your signage and bar registration. Nothing else. The temptation is real, because keywords in the business name is the #3 ranking factor out of 187, and every market has that one profile named "Smith Law Best DUI Attorney Phoenix Near Me" ranking like it stole something. It did steal something, and the name field has a bouncer.

The name field has a bouncer, and he has seen it all



Keyword-stuffed names rank high on the suspension-risk list, and competitors report them recreationally. The legitimate version of the advantage exists, though: if you are naming a new firm, or willing to register a DBA, a name that naturally contains your practice area or city carries a durable edge.

Register it legally, put it on the signage and the website, then update the profile, in that order. And when a competitor stuffs their name without the paperwork, suggest an edit and report it. Cleaning spam out of your market is itself a ranked factor (#19), because every fake vanishing from the pack moves every real firm up one.

Categories: the most important sixty seconds in this book

Your primary category is the #1 ranking factor. Not top ten. Number one. It decides which searches you are even eligible to enter, and nothing else on the profile can outvote it. A firm set to the generic "Attorney" while its revenue comes from consumer bankruptcy is running a marathon in dress shoes.

- Set the primary category to the most specific match for the practice area that pays the bills: "Personal injury attorney," "Estate planning attorney," "Bankruptcy attorney," "Family law attorney." Not "Law firm." Not "Attorney."
- Peek at what the firms currently winning your target searches use as their primary category. That is Google telling you what it associates with those searches in your market.
- You get up to 10 categories total: one primary plus nine secondary. Use secondaries for every practice area you genuinely offer, and no others; unrelated bolt-ons are a documented negative factor called category confusion.
- Re-check the primary whenever the firm's focus shifts. Category changes can move rankings within days, which makes this the closest thing local search has to a light switch.
- Click path: Edit profile, then Business category, then Edit.

Address, map pin, and service areas

Enter your exact street address, then zoom into the map and confirm the pin sits on your actual entrance rather than the parking lot, the alley, or the taqueria next door. A misplaced pin is a negative ranking factor, a suspension risk, and a great way to make a stressed client circle the block. The address itself must be a real, staffed office; virtual offices and mailbox stores headline the suspension list in chapter 17, and having a genuine address inside the searched city is the #4 factor overall, which is why serious multi-market firms open serious multi-market offices.

If you practice from home and hide your address (a "service-area business" in Google's vocabulary), know the tradeoff with clear eyes. Profiles that display an address consistently outrank those that hide one (#7 factor), and firms that hide theirs often watch rankings collapse. The forensics suggest many collapses are actually relocations: with no visible address, Google sometimes re-anchors the listing to the originally verified address, or occasionally somewhere wrong entirely, and the rankings move there with it. So follow the rules, verify at the address where you actually want to rank, and if rankings vanish after hiding the address, find out where they went before mourning them. For the service area itself: you can define up to 20 areas, keep them specific, and keep the whole footprint within about a two-hour drive of home base. Beyond that line lives suspension risk, and no jury of Google reviewers has ever believed a solo practice serves four metros. Click path: Edit profile, then Location, then Service area.

Multi-office firms, read this twice. Google shows one business per category per address (practitioners call it the Filter), so two firms sharing a suite and a category cancel each other like noise-canceling headphones. Across your own offices: overlapping service areas and shared phone numbers both appear on the negative and suspension lists. Every office gets its own address, its own

local number, and its own territory. No exceptions, including the satellite office that is technically a conference room.

Hours: set them like rankings depend on them, because they do

Chapter 3 covered the 5:01 cliff; here is the maintenance schedule that keeps you off it. Enter precise hours for every day. Load the year's holiday hours now, not the night before Thanksgiving. Add the special-hours categories that fit (Google supports entries like online service hours, which pairs beautifully with virtual consultations). Never leave hours empty, which is the #8 negative factor, and avoid "temporarily closed" like it owes you money: the flag suppresses rankings the entire time it is set, and "permanently closed" is the single most damaging state a profile can occupy. Then make the strategic call: if an answering service or AI receptionist genuinely covers your phones around the clock, your listed hours can honestly say so, and you will hold the evening rankings while your 9-to-5 competitors slide off the map every night at 5:01. Click path: Edit profile, then Hours.

Services: the hour your competitors skipped

Open the Services section and check every predefined service Google suggests that you actually offer, then add custom services with plain names for the rest: "Chapter 7 bankruptcy," "Trust administration," "Wage garnishment defense," "Prenuptial agreements." The predefined checkboxes are a confirmed ranking factor (#22), keyword-relevant custom names ride close behind (#30), the whole section feeds AI systems structured facts about your practice, and one in three customers checks offerings before choosing. Write each service description for humans and add fee information where your state bar's advertising rules allow it; the names carry the ranking weight, the descriptions carry the trust. Click path: Edit profile, then Services.

Description and attributes

You get 750 characters to explain who you help, what you handle, where you practice, and why people choose you. Spend all of them, and spend them like a human being wrote them. Two liberating facts from the research: keywords in the description do not affect rankings at all, and keyword-stuffing it is now a flagged negative factor, so the only audience is the nervous person deciding whether to call. Google offers an AI "suggest description" button; treat its output as a rough draft at best, because obviously machine-written profile text is itself flagged as a risk in the research, and your future clients can smell it besides. Then sweep the attributes and mark everything that honestly applies: wheelchair accessible, languages spoken, appointments required, veteran-owned, women-owned, whatever fits. Attributes display right on your listing, they help clients self-select, and empty fields are wasted signals. Click path: Edit profile, then the About and More sections.

Photos and videos: proof of life

Google's numbers here are almost rude: businesses with photos get 42% more direction requests and 35% more website clicks, and 90% of people say they are more likely to visit a business whose profile shows photos. The research adds the twist that quality now beats quantity, and that stock photos and AI-generated images are flagged risk factors. So shoot real things: the actual office, the actual team, the signage, the conference room, the community sponsorships. Make the first photo (the one searchers

see in the results) your strongest. Add new ones monthly so the profile reads as alive, which chapter 9 will explain is now a ranking matter, and note that reviews containing client photos carry extra weight, a thread chapter 6 pulls. Click path: Photos, then Add photos.

The website link (and a tracking tag worth adding)

Link the profile directly to your own domain, never through a forwarding address or vanity URL that redirects, which is flagged both as a negative factor and a suspension risk. For most firms the homepage is right; whatever page you pick becomes your "landing page," and its title, headings, and content feed straight back into map rankings as top-20 factors (chapter 7's problem). Hand your web person one task while they are in there: append UTM tracking tags to the profile link so visits from the profile show up separately in analytics. Ten minutes of work, permanent clarity on what the profile actually produces.

Messaging, social links, and booking: the convenience trio

Three smaller fields, one theme: remove friction for people who have already decided to contact a lawyer and are looking for an excuse to pick the easy one.

- **Chat.** Google lets you add SMS or WhatsApp chat directly to the profile, and 67% of people say they would rather message a business than call or email. For a law firm this is intake gold with one giant asterisk: only enable it if someone (or something) actually answers within minutes. A chat button that leads to silence is worse than no button. Click path: Edit profile, then Contact, then Chat.
- **Social links.** Add your firm's Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, and LinkedIn profiles to the profile; 20% of customers check social pages before choosing a business, and the links make your whole presence look inhabited. Click path: Edit profile, then scroll to Social profiles.
- **Booking.** 77% of consumers expect to book services online, and "appointment link present" is a meaningful conversion factor even though it barely registers for rankings. Add a direct link to your consultation scheduler in the Bookings section (it displays as a link), or connect an integrated scheduling partner to earn the actual Book Now button. Either way, the goal is the same: shrink the distance between "I found a lawyer" and "I have an appointment" to one tap.

Posts and Q&A: the parts you keep doing

Google recommends posting updates weekly, using all three post types (updates, events, offers) with a strong visual, and reports that half of customers look for promotions when searching. The research adds an honesty clause your vendor might not: post frequency and post keywords are not ranking factors, full stop. So post for the two audiences that do respond, humans deciding whether you seem awake, and the engagement metrics chapter 9 covers. A firm we work with treats posts as a monthly batch task: settlements the client agreed to publicize, community sponsorships, a new attorney, a plain-English explainer. Twenty minutes a month, and the profile never looks abandoned. The Q&A section runs on the same logic: seed it with the questions every intake call starts with (Do you offer free consultations? Do you take payment plans? What should I bring?), answer them yourself, and check monthly, because the public can also answer, and the public is not on your marketing team.

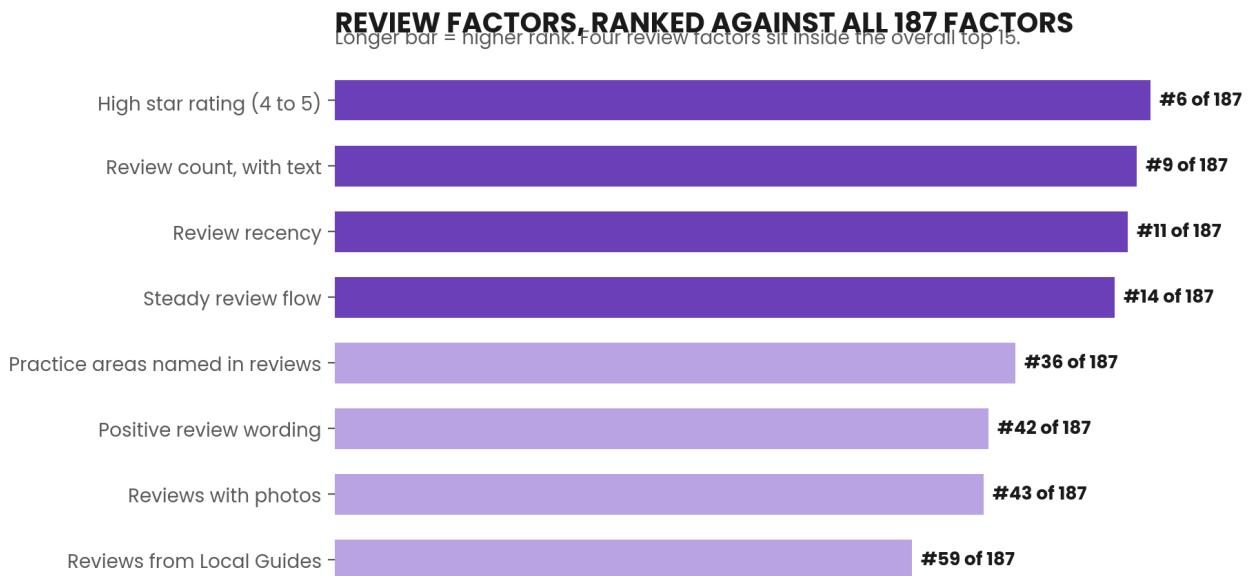
Warning signs the profile is your problem

- Firms with similar reviews and websites outrank you: compare primary categories and Services sections first, because that is usually the whole story.

- Rankings crater on evenings and weekends: that is the hours factor reading your 9-to-5 listing.
- The profile shows information you never entered: it is drifting on public edits and needs a monthly check (Google accepts suggestions from anyone, which is exactly as fun as it sounds).
- You serve a city your office is not in: the city-of-search factor is telling you what the fix costs.

Chapter 6: Reviews Are a Ranking Engine, Not a Trophy Case

Reviews carry roughly 20% of map weight, the fastest-growing share of any signal group, and they moonlight as the #1 and #2 conversion factors, meaning they do double duty deciding whether you are seen and whether you are chosen. Google's data: 91% of consumers use reviews to evaluate local businesses, and 65% are more likely to choose one that responds to its reviews. If you invest in exactly one thing from this book, invest here. The chart shows how deep the review bench runs:



Build the machine, not the moment

Every high-ranking review factor rewards the same thing: consistency. Not the annual guilt-driven email blast (which produces the suspicious review spike chapter 17 warns about), but a system that asks every client, every time, forever.

The review machine: ask every client, every time



Steady beats sudden. A trickle every week outranks a flood every December.

- **Automate the ask.** A text or email after every closed matter, containing a direct link to the review form. Time it to the moment of relief (discharge granted, settlement funded, adoption finalized) and response rates roughly double.
- **Ask a question, not a favor.** "How did we do with your estate plan?" nudges clients to name the service, which quietly feeds the two factors most firms have never heard of: practice areas mentioned in review text (#36) and positive review wording (#42), both of which AI systems read closely.
- **Invite a photo where it fits.** Reviews with photos carry extra weight (#43), and almost nobody in legal is collecting them. Signing day, the handshake, the office. Keep it tasteful; this is law, not brunch.
- **Use the built-in QR code.** Your profile can generate a QR code that drops the scanner straight onto your review form. Put it on the folder clients take home, the reception desk, the closing paperwork. It converts the "I'll do it later" crowd, and later never comes without it.
- **Respond to every review within two business days.** Owner responses rank as a real conversion factor, 65% of consumers favor responders, and a page of ignored reviews reads like a firm that stopped checking its mail. Write like a person. Skip the keyword stuffing in responses; the research scored it a flat myth.

Negative reviews: the professional's playbook

You will get them. Respond calmly, factually, and fast, and remember the rule that outranks all marketing advice: confidentiality. Never confirm the reviewer was a client, never discuss their matter, never let a one-star review bait you into a breach. A composed response ("We take all feedback seriously and invite anyone with concerns to contact our office directly") reassures the hundreds of silent readers, and negative sentiment in review text is itself a ranked negative factor, so the goal is always to bury bad wording under a steady stream of good. If a review is fake, flag it through the profile and respond anyway while the wheels turn; if someone is running an extortion play, Google has a dedicated reporting channel for exactly that, and you should use it instead of the checkbook.

Spread beyond Google

Reviews on other platforms barely move map rankings, and matter enormously for AI answers, where the authority and diversity of the sites carrying your reviews are top-11 factors. The machines forming an opinion of your firm weigh what independent platforms say, so route a portion of your review requests to the legal directories and review sites that dominate the field (Avvo, Justia, FindLaw, Yelp, the Better Business Bureau), and publish a testimonials page on your own site, linked in the main menu, so humans and machines alike find the proof without a scavenger hunt. One professional footnote: review solicitation brushes against attorney advertising rules in some states, so confirm your bar's position before automating anything.

The hard lines

- Never buy or fabricate reviews. Fake-review reports are a negative factor, a top-10 suspension risk, and an ethics complaint waiting for a docket number.
- Never gate (screening for happy clients before asking). It violates federal consumer protection guidance and sits on the suspension list.
- Never run a blitz. A sudden review flood looks purchased even when it is not; the suspension list literally includes "too many reviews too fast." Steady beats sudden, always.
- Never ignore the bad ones. Silence compounds.

How to tell reviews are your gap

- Your newest review is over a month old, or the count has not moved in a quarter.
- The firms above you have similar totals but fresher dates. That is the whole gap.
- You sit below 4.0 stars, where roughly two-thirds of consumers stop considering you and the rating itself drags rankings.
- Your reviews say "great lawyer" while competitors' reviews narrate specific matters. Better asks fix that within a season.

Chapter 7: Your Website Still Decides Half the Game

Your website contributes about 15% of map weight, and then goes on to dominate everywhere else: roughly 32% of the regular results and 24% of AI visibility, the biggest slice in both columns. The page your profile links to also feeds directly back into map rankings. In other words, a weak website is a ceiling on everything else in this book, and the good news is that the fixes are refreshingly unmysterious.

Rank	Factor	What it means for your firm
1	A dedicated page for each practice area	The #1 website factor, #2 for AI answers, #24 for the map. One real page per practice area you want to be found for.
2	Genuinely local content	Pages that read like they were written about your city, not templated with the city name swapped in.
4	Keywords in the landing page title	The title of the page your profile links to is a top factor on every list in this book.
6	Internal links	Your pages pointing at each other with descriptive link text.
7	A clearly focused site	The whole site should obviously be about what you practice.
8	Keywords in headings	Headings naming the practice area and place, written like a person.
9	A focused niche	Firms concentrated on fewer practice areas outrank the everything-store. Top-10 in both regular results and AI.
16	A phone-friendly site	Most legal searches happen on phones, and this is also the #4 conversion factor.
25	Fresh content	Recently touched pages keep gaining ground.
26	Scannable structure	Headings, short sections, bullets. A top-10 AI factor.

One page per practice area, no exceptions

The most valuable content move in local search is also the least glamorous: a separate, genuinely useful page for every practice area. Not one "Practice Areas" page that lists everything like a diner menu, and not thin clones with the city name swapped (Google calls those doorway pages and penalizes them). Each page names the practice area and city in its title and main heading, answers the questions real clients ask before hiring (what does it cost, how long does it take, what happens first), shows proof, and ends with an unmistakable next step. Bolt a short FAQ block onto each one; FAQs on service pages score well for both AI answers and the regular results, and they double as intake-call deflection.

Then write the 2026 way: lead with the answer, keep sentences honest, organize ruthlessly under headings and bullets, and cut anything that exists to impress an algorithm, because the algorithm stopped being impressed. Chapter 3 already delivered the eulogy for the padded 3,000-word page.

The technical basics, minus the jargon

- Your firm name, address, and phone must appear on the site as real text (not trapped in an image) and match the profile exactly. A mismatch is a documented negative factor; a match is a top-15 map factor. This is the cheapest ranking fix in the chapter.
- The site must be fast and flawless on a phone. Test on your own phone over cellular data, in a parking lot, like your clients do.
- Secure connection (the padlock). Non-negotiable, and a hacked site is a rankings extinction event (chapter 16).
- The profile link goes straight to your domain. No forwarding, no vanity redirects.
- Add structured data markup (schema): code that states your firm's facts in machine-readable form. Honest framing: it does not move map rankings (a documented myth when sold that way), and it earns its keep feeding facts to AI systems. Buy it for the second reason.

How to tell the website is your gap

- You appear on the map but nowhere in the results below it. Classic strong-profile, weak-site split.
- Your page titles say "Home" or just the firm name. No practice area, no city, no chance.
- Every practice area shares one page, or each gets a paragraph.
- The site loads like it is being faxed.

Chapter 8: Links, the Authority You Cannot Buy at the Drive-Through

Links from other websites remain Google's oldest trust signal: about 26% of the regular-results weight, 15% of AI visibility, 9% of the map. Quality and relevance thrash volume. One link from your state bar association or the local news outranks fifty from mystery blogs with names like article-directory-supreme, and both legal-industry links and locally relevant links sit inside the overall top 15, along with the wording of the links and the variety of sites they come from.

Law firms are, quietly, the best-positioned businesses in America for this work, because the legal profession comes pre-loaded with link sources most industries would kill for. Bar association memberships come with directory links. Legal aid clinics, CLE presentations, and law school connections come with links. Chamber membership, sponsorships of little league teams and 5Ks and food drives come with locally relevant links plus the community goodwill that shows up in chapter 9's signals. Local journalists need attorneys to quote, and an op-ed in the community paper is a link wearing a byline. The research adds one structural note: steady link growth over time is its own factor, so a patient accumulation beats a binge, and the \$99 link packages in your spam folder accomplish nothing except introducing risk to a license-holding professional who should know better.

Diagnosis is one afternoon: run your domain and your top two rivals through a backlink tool (or have your marketing partner do it). If they hold the bar association, the local news, and three community organizations while you hold a web directory from 2014, you have found the regular-results gap.

Chapter 9: Real-Person Signals, or: Google Is Watching the Room

Roughly 10% of map weight now comes from how actual humans behave around your listing, and the share keeps climbing. Click-through rate from the results sits at #13 overall. Engagement with the profile (scrolling photos, reading reviews, poking around) is #33 and rising fast. Direction requests, calls from the listing, and even office visits detected through visitors' phones all register, and there is evidence of a real-time effect where a busier-than-usual business ranks higher at that moment. Your rankings, in short, have developed a social life.

None of it can be faked, and everyone selling fake engagement is selling you a suspension with extra steps. It can absolutely be earned, in two moves. First, make the listing worth clicking: a strong rating, a first photo with some pride in it, complete information, and recent activity lift your click rate at any position, and a listing that out-clicks its rank tends to rise toward the clicks. Second, give visitors somewhere to land: a profile stocked with fresh photos, answered questions, current posts, and responded-to reviews turns a ten-second glance into a two-minute visit, and the difference is measured. Then answer the phone, because a missed call is a wasted ranking signal and a lost client rolled into one ring.

The deeper play is offline. Community events, speaking gigs, sponsorships, PR, and plain word of mouth make people search your firm by name, and branded search volume is a top-25 factor. The wall between "marketing" and "SEO" has quietly fallen: anything that makes real humans seek you out is now ranking work, which is the most honest thing an algorithm has ever done.

Chapter 10: Citations and Mentions, Small for the Map and Huge for AI

A citation is any appearance of your firm's name, address, and phone number elsewhere on the web: legal directories, map platforms, news stories, association rosters. For map rankings they carry a modest 6%. Skip them anyway and two expensive things happen.

First, your data drifts. Google constantly cross-checks your profile against the web's version of you, and when the web disagrees (old address on Yelp, old number on the BBB, a misspelling on a directory from the previous decade), Google sometimes "corrects" your profile with the wrong data automatically. Consistency across Google, Bing, and Apple Maps is a top-30 map factor on its own, and clean citations are the vaccine against mystery edits.

Second, and bigger: citations are the backbone of AI visibility at roughly 16% of that weight, more than any other surface. AI systems decide whom to recommend by reading the web's collective account of your firm, and they lean on directories, review platforms, and editorial mentions as source material, including some directories traditional SEO declared worthless years ago. Mentions, linked or not, are the currency now.

The citation playbook

- **Fix before you build.** Search your firm name plus phone number and clean every listing showing stale data. Start with Google, Bing Places, Apple Maps, your own website, Facebook, Yelp, and the BBB, which practitioners note has risen in value.
- **Cover the core, then the legal stack.** Consistent presence on the majors plus the legal directories (Avvo, Justia, FindLaw, Lawyers.com, your state bar's public directory) beats hundreds of junk listings. Ten to fifty quality citations is the working range.
- **Open every description with the magic sentence:** "[Firm name] is a [practice area] law firm in [city] that [what you actually do]." That plain who-what-where structure is precisely what AI systems extract, and it takes eleven seconds to write.
- **Confirm the listings are indexed.** A citation on a page Google has dropped from its index counts for exactly nothing. Your marketing partner can check this in bulk.
- **Chase editorial mentions.** News stories, association pages, blogs, and best-of lists: their quality and quantity are the #4 and #7 AI visibility factors, which makes citation work and public relations the same job now.
- **Handle tracking numbers like a professional.** Mismatched phone numbers scattered across the web are a documented negative factor. Keep the primary number consistent everywhere and let your marketing partner implement call tracking the structured way.

Chapter 11: Social and Personalization, the Short Chapter

Social signals earned a real but modest seat at the table: about 3% of map weight, rising to 8% for AI answers. The fine print is where the money is. Follower counts, posting frequency, and post volume all scored as outright myths; the machinery is not counting your audience, and the influencer-brained advice to "post daily for the algorithm" is a treadmill with no destination. What registers is people talking about you: the number of humans mentioning your firm on social platforms is a legitimate AI factor, and your profiles are part of the web-wide record the machines read. So keep accurate, active profiles linked from your website and your Google profile (chapter 5 covered the field), and spend the saved effort being worth mentioning: video explainers, podcast appearances, community moments people share on their own. One firm we work with gets more mention mileage from a single well-shot scholarship-award video each year than from three hundred dutiful daily posts, combined.

Personalization (the searcher's own history, location, and habits) runs 5 to 7% everywhere and cannot be optimized, but it explains a daily illusion: your own search results lie to you. Google knows you, knows you visit your own website constantly, and serves you a flattering mirror. Judge your visibility with proper rank tracking (chapter 19), never with your own browser, and gently break this news to the partner who checks the firm's ranking from his desk every morning.

Chapter 12: Getting Recommended by the Machines

For the first time, every one of the 187 factors was scored for AI visibility: whether ChatGPT, Gemini, AI Overviews, and Google's AI Mode name your firm when someone asks for a recommendation. Adoption is moving fast, Google's AI Mode looks suspiciously like a preview of all search, and the ranking logic reshuffles in ways that reward specific, unglamorous work most firms have not started. The comforting part: everything you have built so far in this book carries over. The strategic part: the priorities change.

Rank	Factor	What it means for your firm
1	Presence on best-of lists	AI answers lean hard on curated "best [practice area] in [city]" lists as source material.
2	A dedicated page per practice area	The same pages that win the regular results feed the machines.
3	Prominence on key legal-industry sites	Being a visible, filled-out name on the platforms that define the field.
4	Quality of editorial mentions	News, blogs, bar association pages, government sites that mention you.
5	Authority of sites carrying your reviews	Respected platforms beyond Google.
6	Genuinely local content	Content that anchors the firm to its city.
7	Quantity of editorial mentions	Sheer volume of mentions across the web.
8	High Google rating	Your stars follow you into the answers.
9	A focused niche	Machines recommend firms whose identity is unmistakable.
10	Scannable structure	Clean headings and bullets make your pages quotable.
12	Brand mentions without links	Even linkless mentions count. Mentions are the currency.

Before an AI recommends you, it reads everything about you



In AI search, mentions are the new links. Feed the reading habit.

The AI visibility playbook

Start with reconnaissance. Ask ChatGPT, Gemini, and Google's AI Mode the questions your clients ask ("best estate planning attorney in Scottsdale," "who should I call about a wage garnishment in Tempe") and record two things: whether your firm appears, and which websites the AI cites as sources. Those citations are your target list. Getting present, complete, and well-described on the exact sites a machine already trusts for your market is the shortest path into its answers, and in most legal markets the sources follow a pattern: best-of lists, the major legal directories, review platforms, local publications, and community forums.

- Earn spots on the best-of and top-ten lists in your market. They aim for independence, so this is petition work: make the case, be patient, and know that some accept payment and say so.
- Complete every prominent legal directory, and open each description with the magic sentence from chapter 10.
- Diversify reviews beyond Google onto the authoritative legal platforms, and publish a testimonials page in your site's main menu.
- Manufacture mentions the honest way: local PR, community involvement, op-eds, collaborations with local writers, podcast and YouTube appearances. Linked or unlinked, they all count.
- Shape site content for skimmers and parsers alike: answer the actual questions, structure everything, stay concise and factual, refresh regularly.
- Add organization and business schema markup so your facts are machine-readable.
- Have your web person confirm robots.txt is not blocking AI crawlers. A blocked crawler is guaranteed invisibility in that tool's answers, and this misconfiguration is more common than anyone will admit.

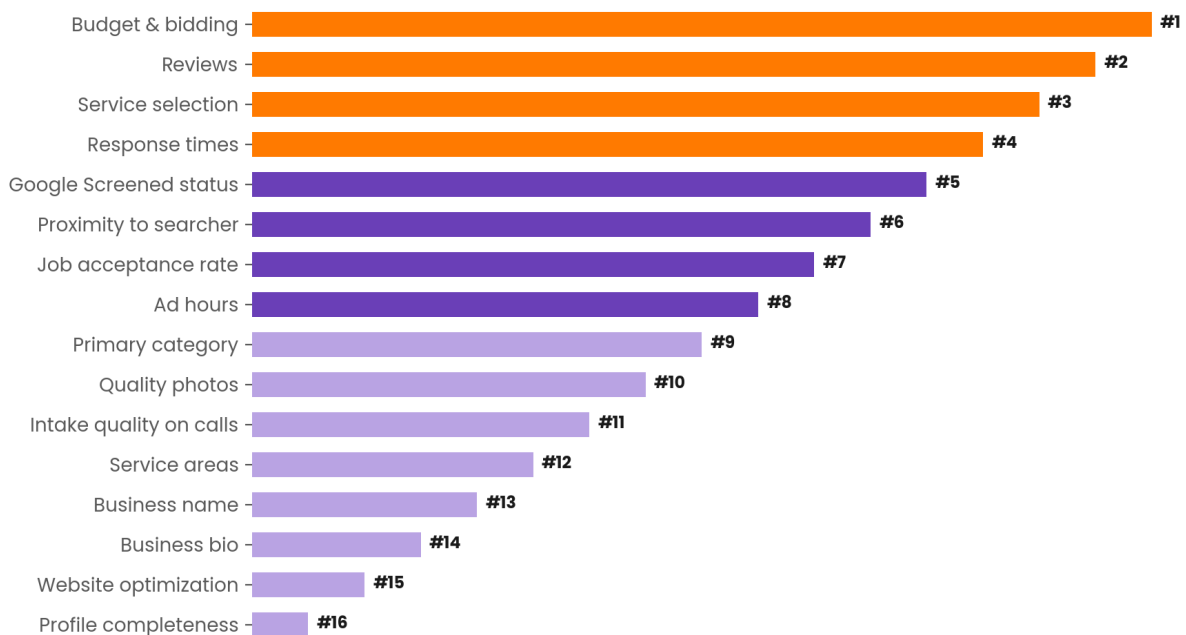
Set expectations on measurement. AI answers often end without a click, so this channel barely registers in analytics. Track it by hand: run the same client-style prompts monthly, log who gets recommended and which sources get cited, and ask every new client how they found you. The firms winning this channel are keeping score manually while the tooling catches up, and the intake question "how did you hear about us" has quietly become a measurement instrument.

Chapter 13: Local Services Ads, the Toll Booth With a Green Checkmark

In legal, the Local Services Ads with their Google Screened badges sit above everything on the page, collecting attention before the map even loads. They charge per lead rather than per click, and they are decisive: firms ranking #1 in both the map and the regular results still commonly take most of their new cases through this channel. If they run for your practice areas, treat them as infrastructure, not experiment. Mercifully, their ranking system is short: sixteen known factors, and the top four do most of the work.

LOCAL SERVICES ADS: ALL 16 FACTORS, IN ORDER

Orange = the big four. Null those before worrying about the rest.



Four field notes. **Budget is the throttle:** an underfunded account cannot buy visibility no matter how pretty the profile, so fund it to compete or do not enter. **Reviews behave exactly like the map,** freshness effect included, so the chapter 6 machine pays you twice. **Response time is completely in your control** and heavily weighted: answer every lead within minutes, and note that job acceptance rate and what actually gets said on the calls (intake quality) are factors too, which is a third place a disciplined intake team or AI receptionist earns its keep. **Check every case type you truly handle,** because service selection is the #3 factor and an unchecked box is a case that called someone else.

Chapter 14: Getting Chosen, Not Just Found

Everything to this point decides whether potential clients see you. This chapter decides whether they call you, and the research scored it separately: every factor rated for its effect on the choice itself. The result reads like a transcript of a stressed person's inner monologue as they compare the three firms on the map, and reviews own the podium.



Look closely and something satisfying appears: you have already built most of this list. Reviews, hours, photos, practice area pages, site speed, every one of them appears in both the ranking chapters and the choosing chapter, which is the book's quiet thesis: Google has spent a decade teaching its algorithm to want what clients want. The additions unique to conversion are pure friction-removal: an online consultation link on the profile (barely a ranking factor, a real choosing factor), click-to-call everywhere, and a website whose first phone screen answers the three questions every potential client silently asks: can you fix my problem, can I trust you, and what do I do right now. Answer those above the fold and the phone does the rest.

Chapter 15: Myths, or Where Your Budget Goes to Die

Knowing what does not work is worth real money, because every hour spent on a myth is an hour taken from the top of the factor list. These items scored at the bottom of the entire study, which means the people who test rankings for a living agree: little to no effect. If a vendor is billing you for any of the left column as ranking work, this table is your polite second opinion, suitable for forwarding.

The myth	The reality
Geo-tagging photos	The #1 myth in the study. Embedding GPS coordinates in image files does nothing. Nothing.
Social follower counts and posting volume	Audience size and posting cadence do not move rankings. Humans mentioning you do (chapter 11).
Running Google Ads to boost free rankings	Paid and organic do not talk to each other. Never have.
Keeping page titles under 60 characters	A software-invented limit. Long, keyword-rich titles rank fine; lead with the human-facing phrasing.
Keywords in meta descriptions	That snippet is ad copy for the click, not a ranking input.
Keywords in review responses	Reply like a person. Cramming "personal injury attorney in Mesa" into a thank-you moves nothing.
Keywords in image filenames and alt text	Write them for accessibility, which is a better reason anyway.
Keywords in the profile description	Not a ranking input, and stuffing it is now a flagged negative. Write it for the nervous human.
Google Posts volume, frequency, and keywords	Post for engagement and conversions (chapter 5), not rankings.
Q&A keywords and volume	Seed it for clients, not the algorithm.
Having an XML sitemap	Fine plumbing, zero ranking effect from its mere existence.
Linking out to authority sites	Generosity is not a ranking strategy. Link out when it helps the reader.
Schema markup (for map rankings)	Does not move the map. Worth adding anyway as machine-readable food for AI answers, eyes open.
Booking buttons and 360 tours (for rankings)	Near-zero ranking effect, real conversion value. Do them for clients.
Service area settings as a ranking lever	The areas you draw describe where you work; they do not expand where you rank. Keep them honest and under the two-hour line.

Read the pattern before you leave. Nearly every myth is a keyword trick or a vanity number, and nearly everything that works is either genuine firm quality (reviews, engagement, reputation) or unmistakable clarity (structure, dedicated pages, accurate data everywhere). The algorithm caught up with reality. The fastest-rising firms are the ones that noticed and stopped decorating.

Chapter 16: What Actively Hurts You

Some problems do not merely fail to help; they hold your rankings underwater. These are the highest-scoring negative factors from the research, in order of measured harm, each with its antidote. Skim the left column against your own profile before your next partner meeting; the fixes are mostly same-day work.

#	Negative factor	The fix
1	Profile marked permanently closed	The most damaging state a profile can be in. If it happens by error or hostile edit, dispute it the hour you notice.
2	Wrong primary category	The #1 positive factor, inverted. Audit against the firms winning your searches (chapter 5).
3	Another profile in your category at your address (the Filter)	Co-located same-category firms erase each other from results. Suite-sharing with a same-practice firm is a rankings trap with nice carpet.
4	Low star ratings (1 to 2)	A ratings problem is a client-experience problem wearing marketing's clothes. Fix the experience, respond to critics, rebuild steadily.
5	Profile marked temporarily closed	Use holiday or special hours instead. The flag suppresses rankings every hour it is set.
6	Misplaced map pin	Drag it to your entrance. Two minutes.
7	Hacked website or malware	A rankings extinction event. Keep software patched, use strong access controls, monitor so you are not the last to know.
8	No hours listed	With hours now a top-5 positive factor, an empty field is a standing penalty.
9	Category confusion	Unrelated bolt-on categories blur what Google thinks you are. Every category should be a practice area you actually bill.
10	Firm name, address, phone missing from the website as text	Contact details must live on the site as real text, not pixels in an image.
11	Negative wording in reviews	The machines read the words, not just the stars. Bury bad wording under a steady stream of good (chapter 6).
12	Address mismatch between profile and website	The landing page must show the same address, character for character.
13	Profile link forwarding to a different domain	Link straight to your real site. Forwarders are flagged twice: negative factor and suspension risk.

Two newer entries deserve a spotlight because they invert yesterday's advice. Keyword-stuffing the profile description or your posts, once merely useless, now registers as actively harmful. And AI-generated text or images on the profile is a flagged negative and suspension risk, which is the

algorithm's way of saying it wants proof of a real firm run by real people. Use real photos, write like a human, and save the robots for chapter 12, where they work for you.

Chapter 17: Profile Jail

Worse than ranking poorly is not existing. A suspended profile vanishes from the map, taking its reviews and history with it, and reinstatement means weeks of appeals while your competitors politely absorb your call volume. The behaviors most likely to put you there, in order of measured risk:

Profile jail: easy to enter, miserable to leave



- **Fake or false addresses.** Virtual offices, mailbox stores, coworking mail drops, PO boxes. The #1 risk, and Google has gotten disturbingly good at spotting them. Real, staffed offices only.
- **Association with suspended accounts or listings.** The #2 risk: trouble on a Google account or sibling listing connected to yours can spread to yours. Keep the access list short, current, and audited (chapter 4).
- **Accumulated guideline violation reports.** Competitors and the public can report you, and reports stack. The defense is a profile with nothing to report.
- **A hacked website.** The same malware that sinks rankings can take the whole profile down.
- **Review gating and fake reviews.** Screening for happy clients, buying reviews, or writing your own: suspension-level risk stacked on ethics exposure no license holder should flirt with.
- **Keyword stuffing the business name.** The most tempting shortcut in local search and one of its most reliable exits. Legal name or registered DBA only.
- **Shared phone numbers or overlapping service areas across profiles.** Both read as listing spam. Every office gets its own number and territory.
- **A sudden review flood.** Spikes look purchased even when they are not. Keep the machine steady.
- **Service areas past a two-hour drive.** Draw honest borders.
- **Stock photos and AI-generated media.** Lower on the list but real. Authenticity is this entire chapter in one word.

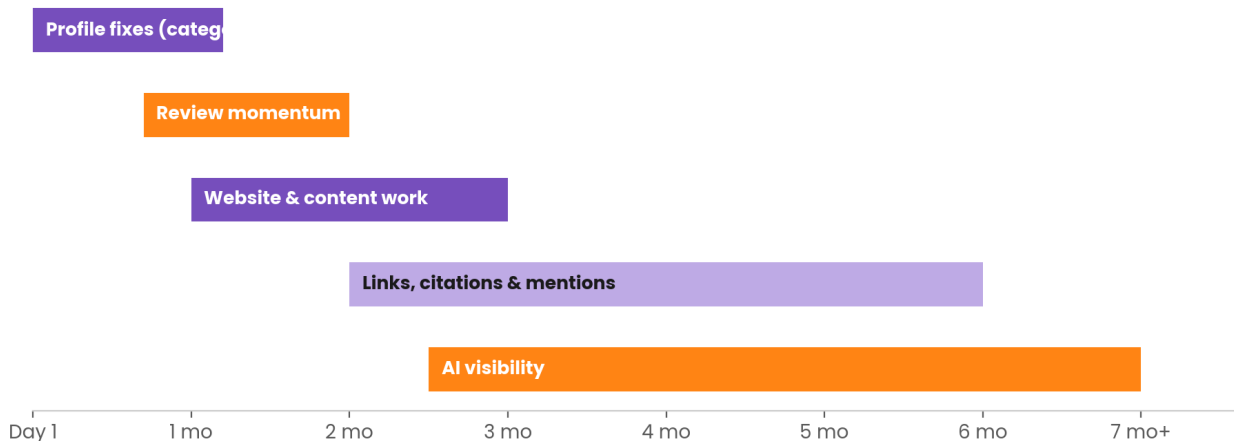
If the cell door closes anyway: do not create a new profile, which turns one violation into two. Fix every issue honestly, assemble proof the firm is real (bar license, business license, signage photos, a utility bill; Appendix A has the full evidence kit), and file a reinstatement request through Google's process. Prevention costs zero. Recovery costs weeks.

Chapter 18: The First 90 Days

Everything in this book, sequenced. The order front-loads the heaviest, fastest-moving factors and saves the slow-compounding work for the back half. A committed firm can run this alongside a full caseload; a good marketing partner can run it while you bill.

WHAT MOVES WHEN: REALISTIC CLOCKS FOR EACH INVESTMENT

When each type of work typically starts showing results in rankings



Days 1 to 30: Foundation

- Stand up honest rank tracking for your 5 to 10 most valuable searches and record the baseline: positions, review counts, and a saved set of AI prompt checks. No before-picture, no bragging rights later.
- Settle ownership: claim the profile, verify, add a second keyholder, evict old vendors (chapter 4).
- Audit the primary category against the firms winning your searches; correct it and feel the light-switch effect.
- Set complete hours plus the year's holidays, and make the coverage decision (answering service or AI receptionist) so the listed hours can honestly stretch.
- Verify the pin, the displayed address, and any service areas (specific, inside two hours).
- Complete every field: services, custom services, attributes, a human-written description, real photos with a strong lead image.
- Confirm the website shows matching name, address, and phone as real text, and the profile links straight to your domain, tagged for analytics.
- Launch the review machine: automated ask after every closed matter, direct link, a question that invites detail, the QR code printed and placed. Commit to two-business-day responses forever.
- Sweep your top searches for spam competitors and report the costumes.

Days 31 to 60: Content and consistency

- Build or rebuild one dedicated page per practice area: title naming the practice area and city, structured headings, concise factual copy, an FAQ block, visible proof.

- Fix titles and headings sitewide, leading with the human-facing phrasing.
- Strengthen internal links so every important page is reachable from its relatives, with descriptive link text.
- Publish a testimonials page in the main menu.
- Clean citations: the core platforms, then the legal directories, every field complete, every description opening with the magic sentence.
- Add schema markup; confirm robots.txt is not blocking AI crawlers.
- Start the monthly photo rhythm and the monthly post batch.

Days 61 to 90: Authority and expansion

- Ask the AI tools your clients' questions, log which sources they cite, and start earning presence on those exact sites.
- Launch one or two link plays: bar or chamber membership, a sponsorship, a local media pitch or op-ed.
- Route review requests to the top legal platforms beyond Google.
- If Local Services Ads run in your practice areas: get Screened, check every case type, fund the budget for real, and build the minutes-fast lead response.
- Re-run the baseline measurements, admire the movement, and shift to the standing rhythm below.

The standing rhythm

- **Weekly:** review requests flowing, every new review answered, every lead answered fast.
- **Monthly:** fresh photos, a post batch, one content refresh or new page, rankings and AI prompts checked, profile audited for edits you did not make.
- **Quarterly:** citation spot-check, link and competitor review, spam sweep, access-list audit, holiday hours refresh, and an honest look at what is compounding.

Chapter 19: Measuring What Matters

Local search rewards patience, but only the measured kind, and the first rule of measurement is that your own browser is a liar. Google knows you, knows you adore your own website, and serves you a flattering mirror every time you check. Four instruments give you the truth instead.

- **Geo-grid rank tracking.** Software that checks your position from dozens of points across the market at once, producing an honest heat map of where you are actually visible. Watch the strong zone spread over the months; that spreading is the whole campaign in one picture.
- **Profile performance data.** Google reports impressions, calls, direction requests, and website clicks straight from the profile. This is visibility turning into action, or not. The UTM tag from chapter 5 splits profile visitors out in your analytics.
- **Revenue attribution.** Ask every new client how they found you, and log it. AI answers and zero-click results increasingly deliver clients no analytics package will ever see, which has quietly turned the intake question into a measurement instrument.
- **AI spot checks.** The monthly habit: same client-style prompts, same log of who gets recommended and which sources get cited.

Calibrate expectations to the clocks in chapter 18's chart. Category and profile fixes can register within days. Review momentum shows in four to eight weeks. Content and website work takes one to three months, and links, citations, mentions, and AI visibility compound over quarters. The firms that win are not the ones that sprint in January. They are the ones that never stop showing up, in every sense an algorithm can now measure.

Glossary

Term	Plain-English meaning
Google Business Profile (GBP)	Your free Google listing: the panel with your map location, reviews, hours, and photos. It powers the map results and Google Maps.
Local pack / map pack	The map with three business listings near the top of a local results page.
Organic results	The traditional website links below the map, ranked mostly by content and links.
NAP	Name, Address, Phone: the identity data that must match everywhere the firm appears.
Citation	Any appearance of your firm's details on another site. Structured = directory listings; unstructured = mentions in articles, lists, and posts.
Landing page	The page your profile links to. Its content feeds your map rankings.
Title tag	A page's title, shown in the browser tab and as the headline of your search listing.
Centroid	A city's center point. Firms closer to it hold an edge in searches naming that city.
Service-area business (SAB)	A business serving clients at their locations, required by Google to hide its street address.
The Filter	Google's one-business-per-category-per-address habit, which hides co-located competitors.
LSA / Google Screened	Local Services Ads: pay-per-lead ads with the Google Screened badge that sit above everything for legal searches in most markets.
Click-through rate (CTR)	The share of searchers who click your listing after seeing it. A behavioral ranking signal.
Schema / structured data	Site code that states your firm's facts in machine-readable form. AI food, not a map ranking lever.
Review gating	Screening clients by satisfaction and only asking the happy ones. Prohibited, and a suspension risk.
Review velocity	The pace of incoming reviews. Steady helps; spikes and droughts both hurt.
Geo-grid tracking	Rank checks from many map points at once, producing an honest heat map of visibility.
AI Overviews / AI Mode	Google's AI-generated answers that appear above, or instead of, traditional results.
Grounding source	A site an AI consults and cites when composing an answer. Getting listed on your market's grounding sources is the core of chapter 12.
Semantic triple	A plain who-what-where sentence ("Vega Family Law is a family law firm in Mesa"). The ideal first line of any listing description.
DBA	A legally registered "doing business as" name. The one honest route to a keyword-bearing firm name.
UTM tags	Small labels added to a link so visits from that link show up separately in analytics.

Appendix A: Gather This First

The single biggest reason profile setups stall at 60% is the scavenger hunt: verification wants a video, the video wants signage, the description wants a service list, and suddenly the project is three weeks old. Collect everything below before you start and the entire setup, verification included, becomes one sitting.

Proof and paperwork

- A Google account owned and controlled by the firm (not a staffer's personal Gmail), with two-factor authentication on
- Exact legal firm name, plus DBA registration documents if one exists or is planned
- Business license and state bar license or firm registration (the reinstatement evidence kit, gathered while nobody is panicking)
- Proof of address: a utility bill or lease in the firm's name at the office address
- Permanent signage installed and photographed: building, suite door, or window, showing the exact firm name
- EIN or entity registration paperwork, filed somewhere findable

Contact and operations

- A dedicated local phone number for this office, answered by humans (or a very good AI) during every listed hour, and not shared with any other profile
- The coverage decision, made: real hours only, or extended hours backed by an answering service or AI receptionist
- Regular hours plus the full year's holiday and special hours, written down
- Website URL and admin access (for the NAP text check, the UTM tag, schema, and robots.txt)
- Consultation booking link, if you offer online scheduling
- Social profile URLs: Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, LinkedIn

Content ammunition

- The complete practice area list, sorted by revenue (the top one becomes your primary category)
- A one-sentence plain-English service description for each practice area
- The 750-character firm description, written by a person
- Photos, shot on a decent phone in good light: building exterior with signage, entrance, reception, conference room, working areas, each attorney's headshot, the team, and any community involvement
- Ability to shoot the verification video on site: name on permanent fixture, surrounding street view, and you opening the locked door with your own key, like you own the place
- A list of every old vendor or ex-employee who might still have profile access, for the eviction round

Appendix B: The GBP Audit Checklist

Run this against any existing profile, yours or a firm you are evaluating, in the order written. Every line is pass, fail, or fix-today.

Ownership and integrity

- Firm controls the primary owner account; at least two current people have access
- No former employees or fired vendors on the access list
- No duplicate listings for this office anywhere on Google
- Profile is verified and not flagged, suspended, or marked any flavor of closed

Core fields

- Name field matches signage and legal registration exactly (zero bonus keywords)
- Primary category is the most specific match for the top revenue practice area, and matches what pack winners use
- Secondary categories cover real practice areas only
- Address correct; map pin on the actual entrance
- Address displayed (or the service-area tradeoff was made deliberately, with eyes open)
- Service areas, if any: specific, 20 or fewer, all within a two-hour drive
- Hours complete, including this year's holidays; no unnecessary temporarily-closed flag
- Phone is a dedicated local number, consistent with the website and directories
- Website link goes directly to the firm's own domain, with UTM tags

Content and depth

- Every applicable predefined service checked; custom services added with plain names
- Description uses its 750 characters, written for humans, zero stuffing
- Attributes swept and set honestly
- Photos: real, recent (something new in the last 30 days), strong lead image, no stock, no AI art
- A post published within the last month
- Q&A seeded with real intake questions and monitored
- Chat enabled only if it is answered within minutes; booking link present if scheduling exists
- Social profiles linked

Reputation and surroundings

- Rating 4.0 or above; newest review under 30 days old; steady monthly flow
- Every review has an owner response; responses are human and confidentiality-safe
- Reviews exist beyond Google on the legal platforms

- No gating, purchased reviews, or spike patterns anywhere in the history
- Website shows matching name, address, phone as real text; landing page title names practice area and city
- Top target searches swept for spam competitors, with reports filed

Appendix C: The Optimization Checklist

The standing rhythm that keeps a correct profile compounding. Print it, assign each line an owner, and let no line live in anyone's head.

Weekly

- Review requests flowing to every closed matter (spot-check the automation actually fired)
- Every new review answered within two business days
- Every profile lead, call, chat, and LSA lead answered fast; missed-call log reviewed

Monthly

- New real photos uploaded; lead photo still the strongest
- Post batch published (update, event, or offer, with a visual)
- One website page refreshed or added; internal links extended to it
- Geo-grid rankings checked against baseline; AI prompt set re-run and logged
- Profile audited for public edits and drift; Q&A checked for new questions
- Review platforms beyond Google topped up

Quarterly

- Citation spot-check across the core platforms and legal directories
- Backlink and competitor comparison; one new link initiative launched
- Spam sweep of top searches, reports filed
- Access list audited; departed staff and vendors removed
- Holiday and special hours loaded for the coming quarter
- Best-of list and editorial mention pipeline reviewed; one new placement pursued
- The honest question: what is compounding, what is stalled, and what does the next quarter get

About Advantage Attorney Marketing

Advantage Attorney Marketing is a digital marketing and technology agency built exclusively for law firms. From Southern California we run search visibility, websites, content, advertising, and the technology underneath it for hundreds of firms nationwide, and every page of this book describes work we do every single day: the profiles, the review machines, the practice area pages, the citations, the Local Services Ads, and the measurement that proves it is working.

If you read this far and thought "this is exactly right, and I would rather practice law," that is the correct conclusion and also our phone number's favorite sentence. Bring this book to the conversation. We will show you precisely where your firm stands on every factor in it, and what the first 90 days look like with a team that has run the play before.

Get found. Get chosen.

Somewhere in your city, someone is typing "**attorney near me**" right now.

In the next ten seconds, Google will decide which three firms exist and which several dozen do not. This book is about winning those ten seconds, and the choice that follows.

Built on research scoring 187 ranking factors, layered with Google's own playbook, and translated into plain English for the people who bill by the hour. Inside:

1

The 5:01 cliff

Why your listed hours became a top-5 ranking factor

2

The review machine

A steady engine that compounds while you practice law

3

The machines that recommend you

Getting named by ChatGPT, Gemini, and Google's AI answers

4

Myths and profile jail

Where budgets go to die, and how firms vanish from the map

5

Three checklists

Setup documentation, the full audit, and the standing rhythm

Darin Swayne is the founder of Advantage Attorney Marketing, the agency behind the local search programs of law firms nationwide.

