FREE GUIDE · 2026 EDITION

How to Get Into the Google Map Pack

The 2026 local 3-pack ranking guide for contractors and local service businesses: how Google picks the top 3, what not ranking costs you, and a 30-day plan to get there.

📍 Inside: Google's 3 local ranking factors · the Map Pack checklist · the review gap · how to check your position · a 30-day action plan

By George "JR" Edmonson Jr. · JREdmonson Solutions · Waco & Central Texas
agency.jredmonson.com · tools.jredmonson.com

CHAPTER 1

What is the Google Map Pack, and why does it matter?

QUICK ANSWER

The Google Map Pack (also called the local 3-pack) is the box of three businesses Google shows with a map at the top of local searches like "plumber near me" or "roof repair Waco." It sits above the regular results, so for most local service searches, the three businesses in it get the first look — and most of the calls.

When a homeowner has a leak, a dead AC unit or hail damage, they don't scroll through ten pages of results. They search on their phone, look at the three businesses in the Map Pack, compare stars and review counts, and call one of them. If you're not in those three spots, most of those customers never see you.

The Map Pack has also become the front door to AI search. BrightLocal's 2026 Local Consumer Review Survey found that use of ChatGPT and other AI tools for local business recommendations jumped from 6% to 45% in a single year — and those tools lean on the same reviews and business information Google uses for the Map Pack.

97%
of consumers read reviews for local businesses

47%
won't use a business with fewer than 20 reviews

74%
only care about reviews from the last 3 months

Source: BrightLocal, Local Consumer Review Survey 2026 (published Feb 11, 2026; 1,002 US consumers).

Map Pack vs. regular search results

	Map Pack (local 3-pack)	Regular results
Where	Top of the page, with a map	Below the Map Pack
What's shown	Your Google Business Profile: stars, review count, hours, call button	Your website page title and description
Main ranking source	Your Google Business Profile, reviews and distance	Your website content and links
How customers act	Tap to call or get directions right away	Click through to read your site first

CHAPTER 2

How does Google decide who gets into the Map Pack?

QUICK ANSWER

Google says local results are based mainly on three things: **relevance** (how well your profile matches the search), **distance** (how far you are from the searcher) and **prominence** (how well known and trusted your business is). You can't move your shop, so your work goes into relevance and prominence.

1. Relevance — does your profile match the search?

Google compares the search to your Google Business Profile: your categories, services, description and the content on your website. A plumber whose profile lists "water heater repair," "drain cleaning" and "slab leak repair" is relevant to far more searches than one that only says "plumber."

2. Distance — how close are you?

Google measures how far you are from the searcher (or from the location in the search, like "Waco"). This is why you rank better near your address and worse across town. A service area that covers the towns you actually work in, plus pages and reviews from those towns, helps you compete beyond your own neighborhood.

3. Prominence — how well known and trusted are you?

Prominence comes from what Google knows about you across the web: links, articles, directory listings and reviews. Google's own help page says plainly that **review count and review score factor into local search ranking**, and that more reviews and positive ratings can improve your local ranking. Your regular search rankings count too, so good website SEO helps your Map Pack position.

Source: Google Business Profile Help, "How to improve your local ranking on Google."

The takeaway

Of the three factors, reviews are the one you can improve every single week. They raise your prominence for Google *and* they're what customers compare once they see the Map Pack. That makes reviews the fastest lever most local businesses have.

What usually keeps businesses out of the top 3

Problem	Why it hurts
Broad or wrong primary category	Google can't match you to specific searches
Few or old reviews	Low prominence, and customers pick competitors
Name, address or phone don't match across listings	Google trusts the profile less
No photos, posts or updates	Profile looks inactive next to competitors
Keyword-stuffed business name or fake address	Can get the profile suspended

CHAPTER 3

What does not ranking in the Map Pack cost you?

QUICK ANSWER

For most local service businesses, missing the Map Pack costs real customers every month — the ones who searched for exactly what you do, in your town, and called someone else. You can estimate your own number in two minutes with the free Map Pack Cost Calculator.

Here's an example run of the calculator for a plumber in Waco, Texas (population about 147,800), with an average first job of $450, ranking below the top 3 for its main searches:

≈ $130,000 a year

About 24 customers a month searching for a plumber in Waco choose a business ranked above them — roughly $10,800 a month in first jobs alone.

Keyword snapshot: "plumber Waco"	Estimate
Monthly searches in Waco (head term + related wordings)	≈ 360 – 1,070
What advertisers bid per click on Google Ads ("plumber near me")	$10 – $81
Ad value of the clicks the top 3 Maps spots get for free	at least ≈ $5,400 / month
Reviews behind the #1 plumber in the example	157

Estimates for planning: national Google Ads keyword data (KeywordTool.io, Nov 2026) scaled to city population, with stated click-share assumptions. Your numbers will vary — run your own.

Run your own numbers — free

Enter your trade, city, keyword, goals, Map Pack position and reviews. You'll see your estimated lost customers, lost revenue, keyword value and review gap.

tools.jredmonson.com/google-map-pack-cost-calculator

How to check your Map Pack position (5 minutes)

1. On your phone, open a private/incognito browser window so your own history doesn't skew results.
2. Search your main service plus your city ("roof repair Waco") and your service plus "near me."
3. Look at the three businesses under the map. If you're not there, tap "More places" and count down.
4. Repeat from two or three different parts of your service area — results change with location.
5. Write down your position, your review count and the #1 business's review count. That's your baseline.

CHAPTER 4

The Google Map Pack checklist

Work through this list in order. Each item strengthens relevance or prominence — the two factors you control.

Google Business Profile (relevance)

- [ ] Profile is verified and you have owner access
- [ ] Most specific primary category for your main trade, plus relevant secondary categories
- [ ] Every service listed, each with a short description
- [ ] Service area set to the towns you actually serve (hide your address if customers don't visit you)
- [ ] Accurate hours, phone number and website link to your most relevant page
- [ ] Real photos of your team, trucks and finished jobs — added regularly
- [ ] A post or update at least every couple of weeks

Reviews (prominence)

- [ ] A review request goes out by text after **every** finished job
- [ ] A reminder goes to customers who don't respond the first time
- [ ] Every review gets a reply — good or bad — written like a person, not a template
- [ ] New reviews arrive every week, not in occasional bursts
- [ ] No incentives, no fake reviews (both break Google's policies)

Listings and website (prominence + relevance)

- [ ] Business name, address and phone match exactly on every directory and social profile
- [ ] Listed on the main directories and your local chamber of commerce
- [ ] A page for each main service and each main town you serve
- [ ] Website loads fast on a phone, with a tap-to-call number on every page
- [ ] Pages answer the questions customers actually ask ("how much does...", "do I need...")

Call handling (turning rankings into jobs)

- [ ] Missed calls get an automatic text back within seconds
- [ ] After-hours calls are answered (AI receptionist or answering service)
- [ ] Every lead goes into a CRM with automatic follow-up

CHAPTER 5

Why reviews are the fastest way into the top 3

QUICK ANSWER

Reviews do two jobs at once: Google counts review count and rating toward local ranking, and customers use them to choose between the three businesses they see. Asking every customer automatically is the most reliable way to close the review gap with the businesses above you.

Most businesses don't lack happy customers — they lack a system for asking. If you get a review from 2 of every 100 customers because you only ask when you remember, and the #1 business in your Map Pack asks every customer by text, the gap grows every month.

Example: 60 jobs a month, 157 reviews behind #1	New reviews / month	Time to close the gap
Asking when you remember (≈ 2 every 3 months)	≈ 0.7	≈ 236 months
Automatic text after every job (≈ 1 in 5 respond)	≈ 12	≈ 14 months

Illustration from the Map Pack Cost Calculator. Response rates vary by business and customer base.

What consumers say they want from reviews

- **Recency:** 74% only care about reviews written in the last three months.
- **Volume:** 47% won't use a business with fewer than 20 reviews.
- **Rating:** 31% now require 4.5 stars or higher, up from 17% a year earlier.
- **Replies:** 89% expect the owner to respond to reviews.

Source: BrightLocal, Local Consumer Review Survey 2026.

Watch: how contractors get found and booked on Google

A short video walkthrough of Map Pack rankings, reviews, missed calls and websites for Waco and Central Texas contractors.

youtu.be/TuK0u-6bmPE — "Waco Marketing Agency for Contractors - JREdmonson Solutions"

CHAPTER 6

Your 30-day Map Pack action plan

Week 1 — Measure and fix the profile. Check your Map Pack position for 3 searches from 3 parts of town. Run the Map Pack Cost Calculator. Fix your primary category, add every service, set your service area, and upload 10+ real job photos.

Week 2 — Start the review engine. Turn on automatic review requests by text after every finished job, with one reminder. Reply to every existing review you haven't answered.

Week 3 — Clean up listings. Search your business name and phone number, list every directory you appear on, and make your name, address and phone match exactly everywhere. Add your business to the main directories and your chamber of commerce.

Week 4 — Strengthen your website and calls. Add or improve pages for your top services and towns, make the phone number tap-to-call on every page, and turn on missed call text back so no Map Pack call is wasted.

Then repeat the position check every month. Expect profile and review changes to show first; competitive trades in bigger towns usually take a few months of steady work to reach and hold the top 3.

Want the review engine done for you?

Google Review Automation from JREdmonson Solutions texts every customer a review request the moment a job is finished, follows up automatically, and helps you reply to every review — so fresh 5-star reviews keep coming without you having to remember.

Get Google Review Automation →

agency.jredmonson.com/google-reviews-automation
Serving contractors and local businesses across Waco and Central Texas.

More free resources: Google Map Pack Cost Calculator · Waco Marketing Agency for Contractors guide · How the Google local pack works · agency.jredmonson.com

© 2026 JREdmonson Solutions. You're welcome to share this guide in full. Statistics are cited to their sources; calculator figures are estimates for planning.