



VERYSEOLY

The 12 types of SEO.

A plain-English field guide for UK small businesses. What each discipline is, the starter move to make this week, and the advanced tactic for when you are ready to go deeper.

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WHITEPAPER

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SEO is not one thing. It is twelve.

Search engine optimisation has a reputation problem. For most small-business owners it sounds like a single dark art, one mysterious switch that a specialist flips to put you at the top of Google. The truth is friendlier and a great deal more useful: SEO is not one thing at all. It is twelve distinct disciplines, each with its own job, working together as one system. When people say "we tried SEO and it did not work", they have almost always done one part well and left the other eleven untouched.

This guide is a plain-English tour of all twelve: Technical SEO, On-page SEO, Off-page SEO, Content SEO, Local SEO, Article SEO, AI Search SEO, E-commerce SEO, International SEO, Image SEO, Video SEO, and News SEO. For each one we explain what it is, why it matters, a starter move you can make this week, and an advanced tactic for when you are ready to go deeper. We have written it so a non-technical owner can follow every line, while the more clued-up reader will still find specialist depth worth bookmarking.

The core idea to carry through every page is this: rankings come from a chain, and a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. A beautiful, well-written page (On-page and Content) cannot rank if Google cannot crawl it (Technical). A technically perfect site will not win locally without consistent listings and reviews (Local). Earning links (Off-page) to a page that loads slowly and reads poorly wastes the effort. The disciplines reinforce one another, and the businesses that win are the ones treating SEO as a joined-up system rather than a one-off task.

You do not need to master all twelve at once, and you certainly do not need to do them all yourself. Read this as a map. By the end you will know which disciplines apply to your business, which to tackle first, and what "good" looks like in each. That alone puts you ahead of most of your competitors, who are still looking for the one switch.

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Technical SEO

Technical SEO is the work of making sure search engines can reach every page on your website, understand it, and trust it enough to show it in the results. Before Google can decide whether your plumbing page or your menu deserves to rank, three things have to happen behind the scenes: a search engine has to **crawl** the page (send an automated visitor, called a bot, to read it), **render** it (build the page the way a browser would, including any content that loads through code), and **index** it (file it away so it can appear in search). Technical SEO is everything that keeps those three steps smooth, fast and reliable. If any one of them breaks, the page may as well not exist.

The simplest way to picture it is to imagine your website as a shop. The words on your pages are the products on the shelves, but technical SEO is the front door, the lighting and the signposts. If the door is locked (a page blocked from crawling), or the lights are off (content that never renders), or the aisles are a maze (a confusing site structure), customers and Google alike will give up before they ever see what you sell. A beautifully written page that loads slowly, or that a phone struggles to display, quietly loses you customers every single day, and you may never know it is happening.

Two ideas are worth defining because they come up constantly. The first is **Core Web Vitals**, a small set of measurements Google uses to judge real-world experience: how quickly the main content appears, how stable the layout is as it loads, and how fast the page responds when someone taps or clicks. The second is **HTTPS**, the padlock in the address bar, which encrypts the connection between your visitor and your site. Both are now baseline expectations: Google treats a secure, fast, stable site as a sign that you are a serious, trustworthy business, and a slow or insecure one as a reason to hesitate.

The reassuring part for a small-business owner is that the foundations are mostly a one-time setup followed by occasional checks, not a daily grind. Get the structure right once, connect the free tools Google provides, and your site will keep working for you in the background. The advanced work goes much deeper, but you do not need all of it to compete locally. You need the basics done properly and kept tidy.

Starter playbook

- Make your pages load quickly on a mobile phone, because most local searches happen on mobile, and a page that takes more than a few seconds to appear loses visitors before they read a word; compress your images and remove anything heavy you do not truly need.
- Submit an XML sitemap, which is a simple file listing every page you want found, so that search engines are handed a complete map of your site instead of having to guess their way around it.
- Find and fix broken links and 404 errors (the "page not found" message), because dead links waste both your visitors' patience and the search engine's time, and signal a neglected site.
- Add HTTPS across the whole site, not just the checkout, so every page shows the padlock and no visitor is ever warned that your site is "not secure", which scares people away instantly.
- Check that your site genuinely works well on phones by opening it on your own mobile and tapping through it, making sure text is readable without zooming and buttons are easy to press with a thumb.
- Set up Google Search Console, the free dashboard from Google that tells you which pages are indexed, which have errors, and what people searched to find you; it is the single most useful tool you can connect.

Advanced playbook

- Keep INP (Interaction to Next Paint) under 200 milliseconds on mobile, meaning the page reacts to a tap almost instantly; INP measures the delay between a user action and the screen visibly responding, and a sluggish response is one of the clearest signals of a frustrating site.
- Use edge SSR (server-side rendering at the edge) with streamed HTML, which means the page is built on servers physically close to the visitor and sent piece by piece as it is ready, so the first content appears far sooner than if the whole page were assembled in one go far away.
- Carry out log-file analysis of Googlebot, which means reading your server's own record of every visit Google's crawler makes, so you can see exactly which pages it crawls, how often, and where it wastes effort, rather than guessing from third-party tools.
- Kill late-font CLS (Cumulative Layout Shift) using 103 Early Hints, a technique where the server tells the browser to start loading fonts before the full page arrives, preventing the jarring jump that happens when text reflows once a custom font finally loads.
- Audit your crawl budget and orphan URLs, where "crawl budget" is the limited amount of attention Google gives your site and "orphan URLs" are pages with no internal links pointing to them, so you can stop the search engine wasting its time on dead ends and make sure every important page is reachable.

- Tame JavaScript render and hydration cost, because pages built heavily in code force the search engine to do extra work to see the content, and "hydration" (the step where interactive code attaches to the page) can slow everything down; reducing it makes your pages cheaper to render and faster for users.

Why it matters

Technical SEO is the foundation everything else stands on. You can write the best content in your town and earn glowing reviews, but if a search engine cannot crawl or render your pages cleanly, none of that effort will ever rank. Getting the technical layer right is what allows all your other work to count.

Key stat: of mobile sites pass all Core Web Vitals, 48%. Source: HTTP Archive 2025.

Worked example

A Leeds plumber has a smart-looking site, but it scores poorly because every page loads a huge uncompressed hero photo. On a phone over mobile data it takes six seconds to appear, and most callers give up first. He compresses the images, switches the whole site to HTTPS, submits a sitemap and connects Google Search Console. Within a fortnight the emergency-callout page loads in under two seconds, Search Console shows it newly indexed, and the phone starts ringing from searches it never used to reach.

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On-page SEO

On-page SEO is the craft of shaping each individual page so that both people and search engines instantly understand what it is about and want to engage with it. Where technical SEO is the plumbing, on-page SEO is everything a visitor actually sees and reads: the page title, the headings, the body copy, the images and the links between your own pages. It is the part of SEO you have the most direct control over, because it all lives on your own site and you can change it whenever you like.

The starting point is matching language. People search using their own words ("emergency boiler repair near me"), and a search engine tries to serve the page that most clearly answers that exact phrase. On-page SEO is how you make the match obvious: by using the words your customers use, in the places that carry weight (the title and the main heading), and by writing copy that genuinely answers the question rather than dancing around it. Two terms worth knowing: the **title tag** is the clickable headline that appears in Google's results and in the browser tab, and the **meta description** is the short paragraph of preview text beneath it. Neither appears on the page itself, but together they are your advert in the search results.

Structure matters as much as words. A page should have one **H1** (the single main heading that states the page's subject) followed by **H2** subheadings that organise the rest, much like a chapter title followed by section headings in a book. This helps a reader skim and helps a search engine grasp the shape of your content. Internal links, the links from one of your pages to another, do double duty: they guide visitors to related pages and they tell the search engine which of your pages are most important and how they relate.

The reason all of this is worth doing well is that ranking is only half the battle. A page can sit at the top of the results and still be ignored if its title is dull or its preview text gives no reason to click. Good on-page SEO earns both the ranking and the click. It is also the most forgiving discipline for a small business: you do not need a developer or a budget, only the willingness to write clearly, think about your customer's actual question, and tidy each page until its purpose is unmistakable.

Starter playbook

- Write one clear, specific title for each page that names what the page offers and the place you serve, because a vague title like "Home" or "Services" tells neither a customer nor Google why they should choose you.
- Use a single H1 heading that states the page's main subject, then organise everything beneath it with H2 subheadings, so the page reads in a logical order that both people and search engines can follow.
- Write a tempting meta description, the short preview text under your result in Google, treating it as a tiny advert that gives someone a concrete reason to click rather than scrolling past.
- Add helpful, descriptive alt text to your images, which is the written description that explains what a picture shows; it helps visually impaired visitors using screen readers and lets search engines understand images they cannot see.
- Link between your own pages so that a visitor reading about boiler repair can move easily to your pricing or contact page, keeping people on your site and showing search engines how your pages connect.
- Put your main keyword in the URL slug, the readable part of the web address after your domain, so that "/emergency-boiler-repair-leeds" tells everyone what the page is about at a glance, rather than a string of random numbers.

Advanced playbook

- Model entities and topical depth, meaning you map out the people, places, products and concepts ("entities") connected to your subject and cover them thoroughly, because modern search engines reward a page that demonstrably understands the whole topic, not just one keyword.
- Measure term coverage versus the top results, a technique where you compare the words and subtopics on your page against the pages already ranking, so you can spot meaningful gaps the leaders cover that you have missed.
- Sculpt link equity to your money pages, which means deliberately directing more of your internal links toward the pages that earn you income (your service or product pages), concentrating ranking strength where it pays off rather than spreading it evenly.
- A/B test your titles using Search Console data, where you try a new title for a period and compare the click-through rate before and after, letting real searcher behaviour, not guesswork, decide which wording wins more clicks.
- Target SERP features per query, where "SERP" means the search results page and "features" are the boxes Google adds such as featured snippets, image packs or local maps, so you can format a page specifically to win whichever feature appears for that search.
- Tune your copy to the dominant intent type, meaning you first work out whether searchers for a phrase want to learn, compare or buy, then shape the page to that

intent, because a buying-intent search served a long explainer (or vice versa) will underperform no matter how good the writing.

Why it matters

On-page SEO tells a search engine exactly what a page is about, in plain terms it can trust, and then earns the click once you are shown. It is the discipline that turns visibility into visits, and it is almost entirely within your own hands.

Key stat: average CTR for position 1 in Google, 27.6%. Source: Backlinko CTR study, updated 2025.

Worked example

A barber in Bristol has a single page titled "Welcome". It ranks nowhere. He rewrites the title to "Men's Barber in Bedminster, Bristol: Cuts, Beard Trims and Hot Towel Shaves", adds one H1 saying the same, breaks the page into H2 sections for each service, and writes a meta description inviting walk-ins and online bookings. He links the page to his price list and adds the keyword to the URL. Within weeks the page ranks for "barber bedminster" and, just as importantly, the inviting preview text earns the click over rivals sitting beside it.

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Off-page SEO

Off-page SEO is everything you do **away** from your own website to build its reputation. If on-page SEO is what you say about yourself, off-page SEO is what the rest of the web says about you. Its central currency is the **backlink**: a link from another website pointing to yours. Search engines treat each quality link a little like a recommendation, on the reasoning that if respected, relevant sites choose to point at you, you are probably worth pointing at. Alongside links sit **mentions** (your business name appearing in articles, directories or social posts, even without a link) and **trust signals** like consistent contact details and genuine reviews.

The key word is **quality**, not quantity. A single link from your local newspaper, your trade association, or a well-known supplier is worth more than a hundred links from obscure, spammy sites that exist only to sell links. Search engines have spent years learning to ignore, and sometimes penalise, manufactured links. So the durable approach for a small business is to earn links the honest way: by being genuinely listed where customers look, by partnering with real local organisations, and by creating something other people actually want to reference, whether that is a useful guide, a piece of local data or simply a service worth talking about.

A term worth defining here is **anchor text**, the visible words that a link is wrapped around (for example, the words "emergency plumber Leeds" carrying a link to your site). Search engines read anchor text as a clue about what the linked page is about, which is why a natural, varied mix of anchor text reads as authentic, while dozens of identical keyword-stuffed anchors look manipulated. Another is **digital PR**, the modern practice of earning coverage and links from news sites and blogs by giving journalists something genuinely newsworthy.

For most small businesses, off-page SEO is the slowest of the disciplines to show results, because you cannot simply edit other people's websites; you have to earn your place on them. But that slowness is also its strength. Links and a strong reputation are hard for a competitor to copy quickly, so the authority you build compounds over time and becomes a real moat around your rankings. Start with the foundations every business should have, then graduate to the campaigns that win links your rivals cannot easily match.

Starter playbook

- List your business in reputable directories such as your trade body, local chamber of commerce and well-known listing sites, because these give you early, trusted links and put your details where customers and search engines both look first.
- Get featured by genuine local partners, such as suppliers you work with, the venues you serve or community groups you support, since a link or mention from a real local organisation carries both relevance and trust.
- Share content people actually want to link to, whether a practical how-to guide, a useful checklist or local information, because the most reliable way to earn links is to publish something worth referencing.
- Build genuine press relationships by getting to know local journalists and offering helpful comment or a real story, so that when you have news worth covering you already have someone who will run it.
- Keep your brand name, address and phone number written exactly the same everywhere they appear online, because inconsistent details confuse search engines and weaken the trust that consistent "citations" are meant to build.
- Encourage honest customer reviews on the platforms that matter to your trade, since reviews are both a trust signal to search engines and the deciding factor for many customers choosing between you and a competitor.

Advanced playbook

- Run digital-PR linkable-asset campaigns, where you create something specifically designed to attract links (original research, a survey, an interactive tool or a striking piece of local data) and then pitch it to journalists, earning authoritative links a simple service page never could.
- Carry out a link-gap analysis versus your rivals, a technique where you list the sites linking to competitors but not to you, revealing a ready-made shortlist of relevant, reachable websites that already link within your sector.
- Reclaim unlinked brand mentions, meaning you find places online that name your business but do not link to it, then politely ask the author to turn that existing mention into a link, an easy win because the goodwill already exists.
- Source journalists via HARO-style replies, where you respond to reporters' requests for expert comment (HARO stands for Help A Reporter Out, the original service of this kind), trading a useful quote for a credited link on a high-authority news site.
- Build topical authority by sector, which means concentrating your links and content within one clear field so that search engines come to see your site as a recognised specialist in that area, rather than a generalist with scattered, unrelated links.
- Control your anchor-text ratio mix, deliberately keeping a natural balance between branded anchors (your business name), exact-keyword anchors and plain-URL anchors, because an unnatural spike of keyword-rich anchors is one of the clearest fingerprints of manipulation that search engines watch for.

Why it matters

Despite every change in search, links and mentions from trusted sites remain one of the strongest signals of authority a small business can earn. They are hard to fake and hard for rivals to copy, which is precisely why they continue to carry such weight, and why earning them honestly pays off for years.

Key stat: more backlinks on #1 vs positions 2–10, 3.8×. Source: Backlinko 2025.

Worked example

A family-run boutique in Harrogate struggles to outrank national chains. Instead of chasing random links, the owner runs a small piece of digital PR: a survey of local shoppers on high-street spending, which the regional paper covers and links to. She then claims her chamber of commerce listing, asks three suppliers who already name her to add a link, and reclaims a mention in a local style blog. Within a season she holds a cluster of genuine local links no chain bothered to earn, and her rankings for "independent boutique Harrogate" climb above them.

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Content SEO

Content SEO is the discipline of planning and writing pages that answer real demand in genuine depth. It is not about stuffing keywords or churning out thin blog posts to look busy. It is about understanding the actual questions your customers are typing into Google, then building pages that answer those questions more completely and more honestly than anyone else in your area. The "real demand" part matters: you write about what people are genuinely searching for, not what you wish they were searching for. The "genuine depth" part matters just as much: a page that half-answers a question will lose to one that answers it fully, including the follow-up questions the reader has not even thought of yet.

To make this work, your content needs to be organised so each topic is covered fully and stays fresh. Think of your website as a small library rather than a pile of leaflets. Each topic should have a clear home, related pages should link to one another, and the whole set should add up to a complete picture of what you do. When Google sees that you cover a subject thoroughly and keep it current, it begins to treat you as a source worth trusting on that subject. This is sometimes called topical authority, and it simply means being known for something rather than being vaguely about everything.

The reason depth wins is tied to how Google now judges quality. Google looks for signals of first-hand experience, expertise and trustworthiness, often shortened to E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness). A page written by someone who has actually done the work, with real photos, real numbers and real examples, reads very differently from a page assembled by someone who has only read about the subject. Google is increasingly good at telling the two apart, and it rewards the genuine article. For a small business this is good news, because you have the lived experience that big content farms simply cannot fake.

Finally, Content SEO is never finished. Search demand shifts, rivals publish new pages, and information goes out of date. The businesses that win treat their best pages as living assets: they revisit them, improve them, and keep them accurate. A page that ranked well two years ago can quietly slip down the results if it is left to rot. The work is steady rather than dramatic, but over time it compounds into a body of content that brings in enquiries month after month without further spend.

Starter playbook

- 1 Answer the actual questions your clients ask you on the phone and by email, because those real questions are almost always the same ones people are typing into Google, and answering them honestly builds a page that earns trust as well as traffic.
- 2 Write for people rather than for robots: use the plain words your customers use, explain things as you would to a friend who has never bought from you before, and let the keywords fall in naturally rather than forcing them.
- 3 Keep one page per question or topic, so that each search has a single clear home on your site, which makes the page easier to write well and easier for Google to understand and rank.
- 4 Refresh your older pages at least once a year by updating prices, dates, photos and any details that have changed, because a page that is visibly current reassures both readers and search engines that the information can be trusted.
- 5 Cover each topic more completely than your rivals do by reading the pages that currently rank and then adding the useful detail they left out, so your page becomes the most thorough answer available rather than just another option.
- 6 Add real photos and real examples from your own work, because genuine first-hand material signals the experience that Google rewards and gives readers a reason to believe you over a faceless competitor.

Advanced playbook

- 1 Resolve keyword cannibalisation, which happens when two or more of your own pages target the same search term and end up competing against each other so that neither ranks well; you fix it by merging the pages into one stronger page or by clearly differentiating their focus, which concentrates your authority on a single URL.
- 2 Add information gain compared with the current top ten results, meaning you deliberately include genuinely new value the existing pages do not offer, such as original advice, a fresh angle, your own data or a worked calculation, because Google increasingly favours pages that contribute something rather than repeat what is already ranking.
- 3 Map your content to the stage of the buying journey it serves, separating early "what is" and "how do I" research pages from later "best", "cost" and "near me" decision pages, so that each page matches the mindset of its reader and quietly moves them towards an enquiry.
- 4 Classify the search intent behind each topic cluster (informational, commercial, transactional or navigational) by studying what currently ranks, because Google will only rank a page that matches the dominant intent, and a sales page will not win a query where searchers clearly want to learn first.
- 5 Prune or merge thin pages that attract little traffic and add little value, because a large number of weak pages can drag down how Google perceives the whole site, whereas

a tighter set of strong pages concentrates authority and improves overall performance.

- 6 Track content decay and re-optimize on a dip, meaning you monitor your important pages for falling rankings or traffic and step in to update and improve them as soon as they start to slide, catching the decline early while recovery is quick rather than waiting until the page has dropped out of sight.

Why it matters

Content is what actually ranks: every result Google shows is a page of content, and the search engine cannot reward you for work it cannot see on the page. What sets the winners apart is depth combined with genuine first-hand experience, which is precisely what Google now looks hardest for and precisely what a real working business is best placed to provide.

Key stat: average word count of first-page results, 1,447. Source: Backlinko, updated 2025.

Worked example

A boiler-servicing plumber notices that customers keep asking the same question: "why is my boiler losing pressure?" Instead of a thin two-line note, he writes one thorough page that explains the common causes, what each one looks like, what a homeowner can safely check, and when to call an engineer. He adds photos of an actual pressure gauge and a leaking valve from a real job. He revisits the page each winter to keep it current. Within a year that single page is bringing in steady enquiries from homeowners who searched the exact question, trusted the clear answer, and then booked the visit.

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Article SEO

Article SEO is the craft of writing blog and news pieces that are deliberately engineered to rank in search, win the eye-catching answer boxes at the top of Google, and pull readers in, then quietly guide that attention towards the pages where you actually make money. The difference between a normal blog post and a true SEO article is intent. A normal post is written and forgotten. An SEO article is built on purpose to capture a specific search, hold the reader, and lead them onward. Both look like articles, but only one is doing a job.

The reason articles are so valuable is that they catch people early, often long before they are ready to spend. Someone who searches "do I need planning permission for a loft conversion" is not buying a loft conversion today, but they will be soon, and the builder whose article answered that question helpfully is the one they remember when the time comes. Articles let you be present and useful at the research stage, which is exactly where trust is won and where most of your competitors are absent.

A well-built article does several things at once. It opens by answering the reader's question quickly rather than making them scroll past padding, because both readers and Google reward a page that delivers on its headline straight away. It is broken into clear sections with descriptive subheadings, so a reader can scan and a search engine can understand the structure. It carries a visible date and a named author, because freshness and a real human writer are signals of trust. And it links sensibly to your related articles and to your service pages, so the reader always has a natural next step.

The most rewarding prize in Article SEO is the featured snippet, sometimes called "position zero": the boxed answer Google lifts to the very top of the results, above the normal links. Winning it puts your business in front of everyone who searches, often with your answer read aloud by voice assistants too. You earn it by structuring a clear, self-contained answer to a specific question in a way Google can lift cleanly, which is a skill that rewards careful writing rather than spend.

Starter playbook

- 1 Give each article one clear angle rather than trying to cover everything, because a focused piece that answers a single question well will always outperform a sprawling

article that wanders across five loosely related topics.

- 2 Use a headline that promises a specific, useful payoff, so the reader knows exactly what they will get and is drawn to click, while still being honest about what the article actually delivers.
- 3 Break the text up with descriptive subheadings, which makes the article easy to scan for a busy reader and helps Google understand how the page is organised and what each section covers.
- 4 Link from the article to your related articles and service pages, so that a reader who finds the piece useful always has a clear next step and the connections help Google see how your content fits together.
- 5 Answer the core question in the introduction rather than burying it halfway down, because readers reward a page that delivers straight away and Google is more likely to feature an answer it can find near the top.
- 6 Add a clear publication date and a named author, because a visible date signals that the information is current and a real human byline signals the experience and accountability that build trust.

Advanced playbook

- 1 Publish original data, such as a small survey of your customers, your own pricing breakdown or figures drawn from your jobs, because genuinely new numbers are the kind of thing other websites cite and link to, and those links are among the strongest ranking signals you can earn.
- 2 Build your author entity using sameAs links, which means connecting your author profile to your verified presence elsewhere (LinkedIn, a professional body, an industry directory) through structured data, so search engines and AI models recognise the writer as a real, established expert rather than an anonymous byline.
- 3 Inject well-placed links from your articles to your money pages, meaning you deliberately guide readers from a helpful research article towards the service or product page that earns revenue, while passing some of the article's ranking strength to that commercial page.
- 4 Structure individual passages for snippets by writing tight, self-contained answers (a clear definition, a short numbered list, a compact table) directly under the relevant question, because Google lifts these neat passages into the featured snippet box far more readily than rambling paragraphs.
- 5 Time your content refreshes to SERP volatility, which means watching for periods when the search results for your target query are shuffling and rankings are unsettled, and updating your article then, because Google is actively re-evaluating those results and a freshly improved page is well placed to climb.
- 6 Win the People Also Ask box by identifying the related questions Google displays beneath your query and answering each one cleanly within your article, because

covering this cluster of follow-up questions both captures extra visibility and signals that your page comprehensively addresses the topic.

Why it matters

Well-built articles capture buyer questions long before the reader is ready to spend, which means you build familiarity and trust during the research stage rather than fighting for attention at the final, most competitive moment. By the time the reader is ready to buy, the business that helpfully answered their early questions is the one already front of mind.

Key stat: CTR for featured snippet position zero, 11.4%. **Source:** First Page Sage 2026.

Worked example

A barber shop writes an article titled "how often should men get a haircut?" The introduction answers it in the first two sentences, then subheadings break it down by hair type and style. The piece includes a small table of recommended intervals, which Google lifts into the featured snippet, so the shop now sits at the very top for that search across its town. A link near the end leads readers to the online booking page. A research-stage question quietly becomes a steady stream of new bookings.

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AI Search SEO

AI Search SEO is the practice of optimising your business so that it is cited inside AI Overviews and answer engines: the AI-written summaries that now appear at the top of Google, and the direct answers given by tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity. Instead of showing a list of links and letting the searcher choose, these systems read across many sources and write a single answer, naming a few of them as references. The goal of AI Search SEO is to be one of those named references. It works in two ways: making your facts easy for a machine to extract cleanly, and making your brand familiar enough to the models that they reach for you when answering.

This matters because the answer now sits above the traditional results. For many questions, the searcher reads the AI summary and never scrolls down to the blue links at all. If your business is named and quoted inside that summary, you are visible at the very moment of the question. If you are not, you are effectively invisible for that search, no matter how well you would have ranked in the old list of links. Being the cited source has become the new page one.

To be the source an AI chooses, you write in a way that is easy to lift. That means answering questions in plain English, putting the answer near the top of the page rather than burying it, and using short, quotable sentences that state a fact cleanly. A machine that has to wade through waffle to find your point is more likely to quote a clearer rival instead. A well-placed FAQ section, with each question answered in one or two tidy sentences, is one of the most reliable ways to feed answer engines exactly what they need.

Just as important is being known and trusted. AI models are more likely to cite a brand they recognise and a fact they can verify against other sources. That means stating clearly who you are and what proof you have (qualifications, years in trade, real results), keeping your facts current and accurate, and making sure your business is described consistently wherever it appears online. Over time this consistency builds what is called a brand entity: a stable, recognisable identity that models learn to associate with your area of expertise.

Starter playbook

- 1 Answer questions in plain English, using the everyday words your customers actually use, because answer engines are built to lift clear, simple language and will pass over a page that hides its point behind jargon.
- 2 Put the answer near the top of the page rather than making the reader or the machine scroll to find it, because both AI systems and impatient humans reward a page that delivers the key fact straight away.
- 3 Add a clear FAQ section that poses the real questions customers ask and answers each one in a sentence or two, because this tidy question-and-answer format is exactly what answer engines find easiest to extract and quote.
- 4 Keep your facts current and accurate, updating prices, opening hours and details as they change, because models prefer sources they can trust and an out-of-date page risks being ignored or, worse, quoted wrongly.
- 5 State clearly who you are and what proof you have, such as your qualifications, years in the trade and genuine results, because this evidence of expertise makes both search engines and AI models more confident in citing you.
- 6 Use simple, quotable sentences that state one clear fact at a time, because a clean self-contained statement is far easier for an AI to lift into its answer than a long sentence tangled with conditions and asides.

Advanced playbook

- 1 Earn citations in the "best of" listicles and roundup articles that AI models lean on, because answer engines frequently draw their recommendations from these third-party lists, so being featured in a respected "best plumbers in Leeds" style article gets you named inside the AI answer by proxy.
- 2 Write claims with statistics built to be extracted, meaning you pair a clear assertion with a specific number and, where possible, a source, because a concrete, quotable figure is exactly the kind of fact an AI prefers to lift and attribute over a vague generalisation.
- 3 Seed a genuine presence on Reddit and relevant forums, because large AI models are trained on and actively cite discussion from these communities, so authentic, helpful contributions where your expertise shows can put your name into the sources the models draw from.
- 4 Add schema markup designed for fact extraction, which is structured code in the background of your page that explicitly labels your facts (your business, prices, FAQs, reviews) in a machine-readable form, making it far easier for engines to extract and reuse them with confidence.
- 5 Keep your brand entity consistent, meaning your business name, description, location and key facts should match wherever they appear online, because this consistency helps models build a single clear picture of who you are and trust the facts they associate with you.

- 6 Track your share of voice in AI answers by regularly checking how often, and how accurately, you are mentioned for your key questions across the main answer engines, because you cannot improve what you do not measure and this tells you where you are being cited and where rivals have taken your place.

Why it matters

AI answers now sit above the traditional results, which means the old goal of ranking first in the list of links is no longer enough on its own. When a machine writes the answer and names only a handful of sources, being the cited source is what visibility now looks like, and the businesses that earn those citations capture attention the rest never see.

Key stat: weekly active users on ChatGPT (Feb 2026), 900M. Source: OpenAI announcement.

Worked example

A dental practice adds a clear FAQ to its site answering "how much does teeth whitening cost in the UK?" with a plain, current price range stated in one tidy sentence, backed by a note on what affects the price. The facts are marked up with schema and the practice is described consistently across its website, Google profile and a local "best dentists" roundup. When a nearby patient asks an AI assistant the same question, the practice is named and quoted in the answer, and the enquiry follows.

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Local SEO

Local SEO is the work of making your business show up when someone nearby searches for what you do. When a person types "plumber near me" or "barber in Leeds" into Google, two things appear: a small map with three business listings pinned to it (the industry calls this the "map pack" or "3-pack"), and the ordinary blue-link results below it. Local SEO is how you earn a place in that map pack and in those nearby searches, so the customer standing a mile away with a burst pipe finds you rather than a competitor.

The foundation of all local SEO is your Google Business Profile. This is the free listing that Google lets every real business claim, and it is what feeds the map pack. It holds your opening hours, your phone number, your photos, your reviews and the categories that describe what you do. Google reads this profile, cross-checks it against the rest of the web, and decides how prominently to show you for searches in your area. Getting it claimed, complete and accurate is the single highest-value thing a local business can do online.

Two ideas sit underneath everything else. The first is "NAP consistency", which simply means your Name, Address and Phone number must be written exactly the same way everywhere they appear: on your website, your Google profile, directories such as Yell, and your social pages. Google treats matching details as a sign that you are a real, settled business, and treats mismatched details as a reason for doubt. The second is proximity and relevance: Google favours businesses that are genuinely near the searcher and genuinely match what they asked for, which is why honest, specific information beats exaggeration every time.

For most trades and shops, local SEO is not a nice-to-have, it is the difference between a phone that rings and one that stays quiet. People searching locally are usually ready to buy, today, and they rarely scroll far. Winning your local patch is often the highest-return marketing a small business can do.

Starter playbook – Claim and verify your Google Business Profile, because an unclaimed or unverified listing cannot appear properly in the map pack and gives you no control over what Google shows about you. – Write your Name, Address and Phone

number in exactly the same format on your website, your Google profile and every directory, so Google reads them as one consistent, trustworthy business. – Ask happy customers for honest reviews soon after the job is done, while the experience is fresh, because a steady flow of recent, genuine reviews is one of the strongest signals in the map pack. – List the actual towns and areas you serve in your profile and on your website, rather than vague claims, so Google can match you to searches in each of those places. – Add real, recent photos of your work, your premises and your team, because profiles with authentic images earn more clicks and calls and look more credible than stock pictures. – Reply to every review you receive, both the good and the critical, because public, polite responses show prospective customers you care and signal an active, attended business to Google.

Advanced playbook – Set one primary Google Business Profile category that matches your core service and add carefully chosen secondary categories, because Google ranks you mainly on the primary category, and the right secondary ones quietly open up extra searches without diluting your focus. – Track your rankings on a geo-grid using a tool such as Local Falcon, which checks your position from dozens of points across your service area rather than one spot, revealing exactly which streets and neighbourhoods you win or lose and where to concentrate effort. – Seed your profile's Questions and Answers and Products sections yourself with the real questions customers ask and the services you offer, because this populates your listing with relevant, keyword-rich content that Google and shoppers both read. – Encourage and gently prompt reviewers to mention the specific service and town in their own words, because keywords appearing naturally inside review text help you rank for those exact terms and read as authentic to both Google and readers. – Build programmatic service-area landing pages, meaning one genuinely useful page per town or service you cover, each with local detail rather than spun duplicate text, so you can rank in places where you have no physical address. – Run Local Service Ads, Google's vetted "Google Guaranteed" pay-per-lead format that sits above even the map pack, because the background screening builds trust and you pay for actual enquiries rather than clicks.

Why it matters For a trade or a shop, the map pack is not abstract marketing, it is the phone ringing or staying silent. The businesses pinned to that little map collect the lion's share of local enquiries, and everyone below them competes for the scraps. Owning your local search presence directly turns nearby searches into bookings, calls and footfall.

Key stat: more traffic for Google 3-Pack listings, 126%. Source: SOCi, 300,000-listing study.

Worked example A boiler engineer in Sheffield claims and fully completes her Google Business Profile, setting "Heating contractor" as her primary category. She lists each

suburb she covers, adds photos of recent installations, and asks every customer for a review, gently suggesting they mention the area and the job. Within months her listing appears in the map pack for "boiler repair Sheffield", and reviews mentioning "Hillsborough" and "emergency boiler" help her rank street by street. The result is a steady stream of calls from people a few minutes away, ready to book.

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E-commerce SEO

E-commerce SEO is the craft of getting an online shop's pages to rank in Google, convert browsers into buyers, and stay technically clean as the catalogue grows. The crucial insight that surprises many shop owners is that the homepage is rarely the page shoppers want. When someone searches "leather walking boots" or "organic dog food", they do not want your front door, they want a page showing a range of those exact products. That is a category page, and category pages, not the homepage, are usually the most valuable pages an online shop owns.

A category page (sometimes called a collection page) lists many related products together, for example "Men's Waterproof Jackets". A product page shows a single item with its price, photos, description and reviews. Good e-commerce SEO makes sure each of these pages is genuinely useful, clearly described, and matched to what people actually search for, so Google sends the shopper to the right page rather than a confusing or empty one.

The hidden challenge in e-commerce is duplication. A single product might exist on dozens of web addresses once you account for colours, sizes, and filter combinations such as "red, size 9, in stock". Left unmanaged, Google sees near-identical pages competing with each other and struggles to know which to rank, wasting its time and yours. Much of advanced e-commerce SEO is therefore about housekeeping: telling Google which page is the real one, hiding the pages that should not be indexed, and tidying up products that come and go. The term "canonical" describes the official, preferred address for a page, and a "facet" is a filter a shopper applies, such as colour or size.

The other half of the job is conversion. Ranking is pointless if visitors arrive and leave. Clear photos, honest stock information, real reviews and a simple checkout all turn that hard-won traffic into sales. With cart abandonment running high across the whole industry, every bit of friction you remove is money recovered.

Starter playbook – Write your own product descriptions rather than pasting the manufacturer's text, because original, specific copy avoids duplicating thousands of rival shops and gives Google a genuine reason to rank you. – Use clear, real photographs

of each product from several angles, since shoppers buy with their eyes and authentic images reduce returns and build trust far better than a single stock shot. – Show customer reviews and live stock status on product pages, because both reassure the buyer at the moment of decision and visibly answer the question "can I trust this and can I get it now". – Make your categories easy to browse with sensible groupings, filters and navigation, so a shopper can move from broad to specific in a couple of clicks without feeling lost. – Add complete sizes, specifications and clear, all-in prices, because missing details create doubt and abandoned baskets, while complete information helps both shoppers and Google understand the product fully. – Keep the checkout simple and fast with as few steps and form fields as possible, since every extra page or surprise cost is a chance for the customer to give up before paying.

Advanced playbook – Win merchant-listing and review rich snippets by marking up products with structured data, so Google can show your price, availability and star rating directly in the results, making your listing stand out and earn more clicks. – Apply a "noindex" tag to thin faceted URL combinations, the near-empty filter pages such as "blue, size 4, under £10", because keeping them out of Google's index stops them competing with your real category pages and wasting crawl attention. – Serve a 410 "gone" status for permanently discontinued products and redirect lines you are merely restocking, so Google cleanly drops the dead pages while you preserve the ranking value of items that are coming back. – Mine your own on-site search logs to discover what shoppers type and cannot find, then build new category pages for that genuine demand, turning unmet searches into pages that rank and sell. – Set self-referencing canonical tags on colour and variant URLs so each variation points to itself as the preferred version where appropriate, which consolidates duplicate signals and tells Google exactly which address to rank. – Sculpt internal link equity towards your top-selling and highest-margin products by linking to them more prominently from the homepage, navigation and related sections, concentrating ranking strength where it earns the most.

Why it matters Category pages, not the homepage, are where shopping searches want to land, and a clean, well-structured shop is what lets Google send buyers straight to them. Get the structure and the conversion details right and you capture ready-to-buy traffic that competitors with duplicated, cluttered catalogues simply leak away.

Key stat: average shopping cart abandonment rate, 70.22%. **Source:** Baymard Institute.

Worked example A boutique homeware shop in Bath sells candles in eight scents and three sizes, which once created over twenty near-identical pages per product. The owner writes a unique description for each scent, sets self-referencing canonicals on the size variants, and applies noindex to the empty filter combinations. She then builds a

"Soy Wax Candles" category page after spotting that exact phrase repeatedly in her site search. Within weeks that clean category page ranks on page one, and clear photos plus visible reviews turn the new visitors into orders.

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International SEO

International SEO is the work of showing each searcher the right version of your site for their language and country, so a customer in France sees French copy and euro prices while a customer in the United States sees American spelling and dollar prices. As soon as a small business sells beyond one country or in more than one language, it needs to tell Google which page belongs to which audience, otherwise the wrong market gets shown the wrong page and the sale slips away.

The central tool for this is something called "hreflang". This is a small piece of code that sits behind the scenes and labels each page with its language and region, for example "this page is for English speakers in the United Kingdom" or "this page is for German speakers in Germany". When hreflang is set up correctly, Google understands that your pages are alternatives of each other rather than duplicates, and shows the right one to the right person. When it is set up wrongly, Google can show the German page to a British searcher or treat your translated pages as copies, which damages everyone's rankings.

Before any of that, you must choose a domain structure: the way your different-country sites are arranged as web addresses. The three common choices are separate country domains (example.fr, example.de), subdomains (fr.example.com), or subfolders (example.com/fr/). Subfolders are usually the simplest and most cost-effective for a small business, because they keep all your authority under one domain. The point is to pick one clear approach and apply it consistently rather than mixing them.

The human side matters just as much as the technical side. Translation should be done by a native speaker, not a machine alone, because clumsy wording erodes trust instantly. Prices should appear in the local currency, spelling should match the market (colour for Britain, color for America), and shoppers should be able to switch language easily. Shoppers are wary of sites that do not speak their language, so getting this right widens your market rather than narrowing it.

Starter playbook – Decide deliberately which countries you genuinely serve and can fulfil orders to, because spreading translated pages across markets you cannot actually supply wastes effort and disappoints customers. – Use the correct spelling and

vocabulary for each market, such as "trousers" for Britain and "pants" for America, so the copy reads as written by a local rather than an outsider. – Show prices in the local currency for each region, because a shopper seeing an unfamiliar currency has to do mental conversion and is far more likely to abandon the purchase. – Pick one clear domain structure, whether subfolders, subdomains or separate domains, and apply it consistently, so both Google and your customers find your site logical and predictable. – Have a native speaker translate your content rather than relying on machine translation alone, because natural, accurate language builds trust while awkward phrasing quietly drives buyers away. – Offer a clear, easy-to-find language switcher so visitors can move to their preferred version in one click if they have landed on the wrong one.

Advanced playbook – Validate your hreflang return tags at scale, meaning you confirm that every page pointing to an alternate also receives a matching pointer back, because hreflang only works when the references are reciprocal, and a single missing return tag silently breaks the pair. – Set an "x-default" hreflang value on your language-picker or fallback page, which tells Google which version to show searchers whose language and region you do not specifically target, catching everyone who falls outside your defined markets. – Build local backlinks market by market, earning mentions from French sites for your French pages and German sites for your German pages, because authority earned in a country strengthens your rankings within that country specifically. – Localise not just words but currency, payment methods and offers, so a German shopper sees euros and familiar payment options while a British shopper sees pounds, because true localisation removes the friction that abandons baskets. – Geotarget your country subfolders in Google Search Console, explicitly assigning example.com/fr/ to France and example.com/de/ to Germany, which removes Google's guesswork about who each section is for when you use a generic .com domain. – Track each market in its own Search Console property so you can see clicks, rankings and issues per country separately, because a problem hidden inside an aggregate total becomes obvious the moment each market is measured on its own.

Why it matters Get hreflang or your site structure wrong and Google shows the wrong market the wrong page: French shoppers landing on English copy, or translated pages cannibalising one another. Done well, international SEO opens whole new countries of demand from a single, well-organised website.

Key stat: of shoppers rarely or never buy from English-only websites, 60%.
Source: CSA Research, via Weglot 2025.

Worked example A small Cornish skincare brand starts selling into France and Germany using subfolders: example.com/fr/ and example.com/de/. The founder has a native speaker translate each product page, switches prices to euros, and adds hreflang tags linking the English, French and German versions together with an x-default on the

homepage picker. She geotargets each subfolder in Search Console and tracks the three markets as separate properties. Soon her French pages rank in France for "crème hydratante naturelle", and German customers buy without ever hitting an English page.

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Image SEO

Image SEO is the work of making the pictures on your website findable, understandable and quick to load. Google shows images in ordinary text results and Discover, not only the Images tab. A search engine cannot see a photograph, so it leans on the clues around it: the file name, the written description known as alt text, the caption and the words on the page. Google does not index CSS background images; a picture only counts in an HTML `img` element. Weight matters too: on 68% of mobile pages the largest element painted is an image, and WebP and AVIF generally compress better than JPEG and PNG.

Starter playbook

- Rename photos before uploading, so "walnut-frame-a3-print.jpg" replaces "IMG_0412.jpg".
- Write alt text that says what is in the picture in plain words, not a string of keywords.
- Place each image beside the text it illustrates and add a caption.
- Resize and compress every photo before upload, exporting as WebP where your site allows.
- Swap stock photography for photographs of your own work, premises and people.
- Search your business name in Google Images and check real photos come back.

Advanced playbook

- Serve responsive images with `srcset` or the `picture` element, always keeping a fallback `src`.
- Lazy-load images below the fold, never the hero; Google does not scroll, so content must load as it enters view.
- Submit an image sitemap so Google finds images it might otherwise miss.
- Add Product or Recipe structured data with the `image` property, which can earn a badge in Google Images.
- Set a preferred image with `og:image` or `primaryImageOfPage` so Google picks a representative photo.

- Move any words baked into images into real HTML text so they can be indexed.

Why it matters

Original photographs of real work are evidence. Google's helpful-content guidance asks whether a page demonstrates first-hand experience and names photographs as proof that builds trust. A stock image proves nothing; a picture of your bench proves you did the job.

Key stat: of img elements on the web have no alt text, 45%. Source: HTTP Archive Web Almanac 2024.

Worked example

AS Frames finishes a walnut frame around a restored 1950s wedding photograph and photographs it on the Chapel Allerton bench before posting it. The file is renamed "walnut-frame-restored-wedding-photo.jpg", exported as a 1,400-pixel WebP, and placed on the photo-restoration page with a caption and alt text describing the job. That is a photograph that can appear in Google Images for a search like "restored wedding photo framed", showing a real bench and a real frame, not a catalogue render.

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Video SEO

Video SEO is the work of getting your videos found in Google as well as on YouTube. Google ranks the page a video sits on, not the file itself. Its guidance is that the page must be indexed and doing reasonably well in Search, the video must be visible rather than hidden behind other elements, and it needs a thumbnail at one stable address that Googlebot can fetch. Google calls the ideal page a watch page, where watching one video is the main reason for the visit, and suggests a dedicated page per video. Qualifying videos can appear in Search, Video mode, Google Images and Discover, so for a small business the set-up is YouTube plus a page on your own site.

Starter playbook

- Upload to YouTube with a specific title, then embed it on a page of its own on your site.
- Add a transcript or written summary beneath the player so the page has words to rank on.
- Set a custom thumbnail and keep its address stable; Google wants one per video.
- Add YouTube chapters: three or more timestamps in the description, starting at 00:00, ten seconds or longer each.
- Check the page and thumbnail are public, not behind a login or robots.txt.
- Link the video page and the related service page both ways.

Advanced playbook

- Add VideoObject structured data: name, description, thumbnailUrl, uploadDate, plus duration and embedUrl.
- Mark key moments with Clip (start, end and label per segment) or SeekToAction.
- Publish a video sitemap, using player_loc for YouTube embeds, so new videos are found sooner.
- Swap the YouTube iframe for a facade (a still image that loads the player on click).
- Keep video files and thumbnails at unchanging URLs.

- Re-check each video page in Search Console after changing the embed or thumbnail.

Why it matters

A video without a page of its own is invisible to Google. A fast, public, well-described page per video is a second route into search that ends at your phone number.

Key stat: videos uploaded to YouTube every day, on average, over 20 million.
Source: YouTube press page 2026.

Worked example

JorTech films a laptop battery replacement and uploads it to YouTube with the model in the title and chapters for opening the case, swapping the cell and testing. A guide page on jortech.co.uk embeds it through a facade, with a written step-by-step, VideoObject markup, matching Clip segments, and a link to the laptop repair service. Viewers who would rather not do it themselves are one click from booking.

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News SEO

News SEO is the work of getting timely, dated, bylined content into Google's news surfaces: the Google News app, Top stories, which Google says may appear for news-oriented queries, the News tab, and Discover, a feed matched to interests. Google says publishers are automatically considered for Top stories and the News tab; Publisher Center is a management tool, not a gate. Google calls Discover traffic less predictable than search.

Most small businesses are not news publishers. What they can borrow is news-like freshness: a dated, bylined update the week something changes for their customers, such as a tax rule. Google's news policies ask for clear dates and bylines, author and publisher information, and contact details.

Starter playbook

- Publish a dated, bylined update the week a rule changes for your customers.
- Show one visible date, labelled "Published" or "Last updated".
- Name a real author with a short bio linked to a profile page.
- Put contact and company details in the footer.
- Link the update to the relevant service page.
- Add a corrections line if you change a fact after publishing.

Advanced playbook

- Add Article structured data with headline, image, datePublished, dateModified and author; NewsArticle for reporting, BlogPosting for explainers.
- Give author.name the name alone, use Person, and add a url or sameAs to a profile.
- Change dateModified only for a significant update; keep stray dates off the page.
- Keep a dated changelog within the page rather than republishing at a new URL.
- Publish a corrections and standards page, linked from every timely piece.
- Watch Search Console's Discover and News reports rather than chasing the feed.

Why it matters

Google rewards accountability: who wrote it, when, and who stands behind it. A small business will rarely reach Top stories, but a visible date, a real byline and an honest changelog build trust that ordinary rankings lean on.

Key stat: trust in news overall among UK respondents, 35%. Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025.

Worked example

A Leeds accountant learns HMRC has changed a reporting threshold for sole traders. That week she publishes an explainer under her own name, with a visible "Published" date, a link to her profile page, BlogPosting markup with datePublished and author, and a section headed "what this means for you". It never reaches Top stories, but it ranks for the question her clients are typing, and when HMRC clarifies the guidance she adds a dated "Updated" line rather than a new post.

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How to prioritise

For a typical local UK small business, work in this order:

- 1 Start with Local SEO and Technical SEO. Local wins you the nearby customers who are ready to buy today, and Technical makes sure Google can actually read your site. These two move the needle fastest.
- 2 Next, get On-page and Content SEO right. Clear, helpful pages that answer real questions are what turn visits into enquiries, and what AI Search increasingly rewards.
- 3 Then build Off-page SEO and Article SEO steadily over time. Reputation and links are earned, not bought, so treat them as a long game.
- 4 Do Image SEO as you go: every photograph of real work you publish is a page asset and a search asset at once, so name it, describe it and keep it light from the start.
- 5 Reach for Video SEO when you have something worth filming, and put each video on its own page with a transcript, not only on YouTube.
- 6 Only reach for E-commerce, International and News SEO if you sell online, serve customers in more than one country, or publish timely, dated updates that people search for the week they happen. If you do not, skip them with a clear conscience.

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Bringing it together

Bringing it together, the twelve disciplines are not a menu to pick one item from. They are a single system, and each one supports the others.

Technical SEO opens the door, On-page and Content SEO furnish the rooms, Image and Video SEO show the work, Local SEO puts you on the map, Off-page and Article SEO build your reputation, AI Search SEO keeps you visible as search itself changes, and E-commerce, International and News SEO extend your reach when you are ready for them. You do not have to perfect all twelve tomorrow. You simply need to know where you stand on each, and to keep the weakest links from holding back the rest.

If reading that has left you thinking "this makes sense, but I would rather get on with running my business", that is exactly where we come in. VerySEOLy is a small UK studio, and we look after managed websites and SEO for small businesses and local trades from GBP49 a month, with no jargon and no long contracts. The easiest place to start is a free Site Score: we will look at your site across these twelve disciplines and tell you, honestly, what is already working and what is worth fixing first. There is no pressure and no obligation, just a clear picture and a friendly second opinion whenever you are ready.

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