



DMP Week 2 – Google Search

This session, delivered by **Evan** on behalf of the **Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Clare**, focused on the mechanics of **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** and the emerging landscape of **AI search**. Evan explained how businesses can improve their visibility across three distinct areas of Google: **sponsored ads**, **organic results**, and **Google Profiles**, while also preparing for the future of "answer engines" like Gemini and Perplexity.

1. AI Ethics, Copyright, and Legal Consent

Before diving into SEO, Evan addressed follow-up questions regarding the ethical use of AI-generated content.

- **Copyright and AI:** Evan noted that a US court ruling determined there are no copyright protections for images, text, or videos created solely by AI, as the AI itself is not a legal entity. Consequently, businesses can freely use AI-generated images in marketing, but they do not "own" the copyright.
 - **The EU AI Act and Transparency:** Evan highlighted the **EU AI Act**, which mandates that businesses should not use AI to deceive customers. He clarified that using AI as an editing tool (e.g., changing the colour of a real product) is generally acceptable without declaration. However, if a business creates a **completely fictional person** to model a product, they should use a hashtag like **#AI-assisted** or a disclaimer to remain transparent and maintain brand trust.
 - **Model Consent:** Regarding real people in marketing, Evan recommended getting **written consent** (even via a simple Word document) from staff or customers featured in videos or photos. This protects the business if the individual later requests that the content be removed.
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2. The Three Components of Google Search

Evan broke down the Google Search Results Page (SERP) into three primary sections:

1. **Sponsored Results (Ads):** These appear at the top and are marked as "Sponsored". Businesses pay per click, and while Evan noted this wasn't the day's focus, he explained that costs can range from 40 cent for low-competition niches to several euro for competitive sectors like insurance.

2. **Organic Results:** These are the "10 best" free web pages Google selects for a search term. Evan emphasised that **70% of users do not go beyond Page 1**, making high organic ranking vital for traffic.
 3. **Google Map Results (Profiles):** For searches with geographic intent (e.g., "Restaurants in Limerick"), Google displays a "pack of three" business profiles above the organic results.
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3. Optimising Google Profiles (formerly Google My Business)

Evan argued that every business should have a Google Profile because it is free and often appears above organic website links.

Setup and Verification

- **Verification:** To prevent fake profiles, Google requires verification. Evan suggested using a **landline number** for an automated verification call, as the traditional postcard method can take weeks and often gets lost.
- **Privacy:** For home-based businesses, Evan explained that you can choose **not to display a physical address** and instead define "service areas" (e.g., specific counties or towns).

Ranking Factors for Profiles

Evan identified three pillars that determine if a profile reaches the "Top 3":

- **Relevance:** How well the profile matches the search. Evan advised using **up to 10 categories** (one primary and nine secondary) to help Google understand the business. He warned that the **Primary Category** is weighted heavily; changing it can significantly impact rankings.
- **Completeness:** Profiles must be "fully baked". This includes adding opening hours, social media links, detailed descriptions, and regular updates for bank holidays.
- **Reputation (Reviews):** Evan called reviews the "tiebreaker". He stressed that businesses in competitive industries (like restaurants) need hundreds of reviews, whereas service providers (like solicitors) might only need a few to dominate.

The Review Strategy

Evan advised against telling customers to "search for us and leave a review," as many get lost. Instead, he showed how to generate a **direct link** or **QR code** from the Google Profile dashboard that opens the review box immediately. He also suggested using a **personal "small business" appeal** in emails to encourage higher response rates.

4. Technical SEO: Speed and Authority

Evan explained that Google uses "spiders" (bots) to scan websites every 7-10 days to assess 200 different ranking factors. Two critical technical factors are:

- **Page Speed:** Google prioritises a good user experience. Evan highlighted **LCP (Largest Contentful Paint)** as the key metric, with a target of **1.2 seconds or less**. He recommended using **GTmetrics.com** to test pages and suggested optimizing images before uploading to improve speed.
 - **Domain Authority (Backlinks):** This is a score out of 100 representing how much Google trusts a site. Trust is built through **backlinks**—links from other reputable websites to yours. Evan noted that links from high-authority sites like LEO, Fáilte Ireland, or local news outlets act as "votes of confidence". Social media links do **not** contribute to domain authority.
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5. On-Page SEO and Content Relevance

Relevance is the only factor fully within a business owner's control. Evan taught a specific workflow for optimizing every page on a website:

- **The "One Topic per Page" Rule:** Google wants to land users on a page dedicated to their specific search. Evan noted that instead of one "Services" page, a business should have individual pages for every specific service (e.g., "Refresher Lessons," "Nervous Driver Lessons," "Automatic Lessons").
 - **Meta Titles (SEO Titles):** This is the blue link in search results and the most heavily weighted on-page factor. Evan recommended keeping these under **60-70 characters**, putting the most important keywords at the start, and using AI to brainstorm variations that match search intent.
 - **Meta Descriptions:** While not a direct ranking factor, these "tease" the user to click. Evan suggested keeping these under **155 characters** and focusing on the three main benefits customers value.
 - **Headlines and Body Text:** Evan said headlines should be written for people first, but should include the main search term to signal relevance to Google.
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6. The Future: AI Mode and "Answer Engines"

Evan concluded by discussing **AI Mode** (powered by Gemini) and other AI search tools like **Perplexity** and **ChatGPT Search**.

- **From Links to Answers:** Unlike traditional Google, which provides links, AI search engines "synthesize" information to provide direct answers.
- **How to Rank for AI:** AI engines recommend businesses based on **reputation** and **specific detail**. Evan advised "reverse engineering" by asking the AI why it recommended a competitor and what criteria it used.

- **Beefing up Content:** To be recommended by AI, businesses must have highly detailed "About Us" or service pages that explicitly list their credentials, years of experience, and specific areas of expertise.
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Action Point List for Participants

Google Profile (Immediate Tasks)

- **Check Verification:** If not verified, use a landline to get an automated code rather than waiting for a postcard.
- **Category Audit:** Add up to 10 relevant categories to your profile, ensuring your **Primary Category** is your most important service.
- **Review Generation:** Generate your direct review link from the dashboard and add it to your email signature or a QR code for physical premises.
- **Multimedia Update:** Upload at least five photos and several short videos (under 1 minute) to your profile to improve visual interest.

Technical SEO

- **Test Page Speed:** Run your homepage and key service pages through **GTmetrics.com**. If LCP is over 2.5 seconds, look into image optimization.
- **Check Domain Authority:** Use the **Neil Patel Backlink Checker** to see your score and identify who is linking to your competitors.
- **Backlink Outreach:** List 5-10 local partners, suppliers, or charities you support and ask them for a link on their "Partners" or "Resources" page.

Content and On-Page SEO

- **Page Gap Analysis:** Identify if you need new dedicated pages for specific services or "niche" search terms (e.g., "Gifts for Godson" vs just "Gifts").
- **Meta Title Overhaul:** Use ChatGPT (with an "SEO Expert" prompt) to rewrite your **Meta Titles** for every page, keeping the most important keywords at the beginning.
- **Optimize Meta Descriptions:** Write unique descriptions for each page (max 155 characters) that highlight specific customer benefits.

Preparing for AI Search

- **Reverse Engineer AI Recommendations:** Open **Perplexity** or **Google AI Mode** and ask: "Recommend [Your Industry] in [Your Area].".
- **Identify AI Criteria:** Ask the AI: "Why did you recommend those businesses? What criteria did you use?".
- **Update "About" Content:** Ensure the criteria the AI values (e.g., years of experience, specific certifications) are clearly written on your website's "About" or service pages.

This was created with the help of one of our AI colleagues 😊