



Local Enterprise Office Clare

SEO for Beginners – Using AI Tools

Course Summary

1st April 2026

Prepared by The Marketing Crowd

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

SEO for Small Business

Training Session Summary | LEO Clare | 1 April 2026

1. Course Overview

This session was delivered by Evan for Local Enterprise Office Clare as a beginner-level course on Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) – how to get found high up in Google search results. The course ran from approximately 9:35am to 12:40pm, including a 15-minute coffee break, with an extended Q&A and post-session one-to-one time for participants who stayed on.

The session covered three core areas: how to set up and optimise a Google Business Profile to appear in local map results; how to optimise website pages to rank in organic Google search results; and an introduction to Google's new AI Mode – a significant shift in how search engines work and what it means for small businesses. ChatGPT was used throughout the session as a practical tool to help with keyword research, writing descriptions, and generating meta titles.

2. Key Topics Covered

How Google Search Works

Evan opened by walking participants through the structure of a Google search results page. When you search for a broad term like "car insurance", the results at the top are paid ads (labelled as "Sponsored"). Beneath those ads are the 10 free organic results – the pages Google considers most relevant for that search. Google's goal is to provide the best possible results so people keep using its search engine.

When a geographic term is included in a search (e.g. "restaurants in Limerick"), a map appears at the top of the results. These map results show Google Business Profiles – not websites – and Google selects what it considers to be the three best profiles for that search. There are also typically three more profiles shown further down the page, between the organic results. A Google Business Profile is completely free to set up and, critically, it appears above the 10 organic results, making it highly visible.

Evan noted that 70% of searchers don't go beyond page 1 if they don't find what they're looking for – they simply redo the search. And 95% of people don't go beyond page 3. Being on page 4 or beyond is essentially the same as being invisible.

Google Business Profile: Setup

To create a Google Business Profile, participants go to google.com/business and sign in with a Gmail account. If no profile exists for their business, they click "Add Business" and follow the steps. During setup, the key decisions are:

- Business name — type it in to check whether a profile already exists
- Category — choose from Google's list of categories (you can add up to 10 in total; only one can be chosen at setup, but others can be added afterward)
- Location — whether to show an address on the map (choose "yes" if customers visit you, "no" if you work from home or prefer not to display your address)
- Service areas — list the towns, counties, or regions where you serve customers
- Contact details — phone number and website address; treat this as a marketing tool, not a privacy form

To verify the profile, Google needs to confirm you are who and where you say you are. The fastest method is to enter a landline number during setup — Google will call with a verification code. If only a mobile number is provided, Google will require a mailing address and send a postcard with a code, which takes approximately two weeks to arrive.

Google Business Profile: Optimisation

Once verified, the profile must be kept relevant and comprehensively filled in. Evan walked participants through accessing their profile via google.com/business or by searching for their business name on Google while logged into the Gmail account used to create it. Key sections to complete include:

- Categories — go back and add up to 9 additional categories beyond the primary one; this directly affects which searches you appear for
- Primary category — the most important signal for relevance; check what primary categories the businesses appearing in the top 3 results for your target search have chosen
- Business description — should include relevant keywords, your location, and reasons why customers should choose you; ChatGPT can help write this
- Opening hours — essential; update for bank holidays when Google prompts you to do so
- Photos and videos — upload at least 10; think about what you'd post on Instagram or Facebook: products, staff, premises, behind-the-scenes, video tips
- Services — if prompted, list all the services you offer, as this adds to relevance

- Social media links – connect your profile to your social accounts

A common mistake Evan highlighted: one participant had changed her primary category from "Florist" to "Wedding Service" and lost her top-3 position entirely. Google no longer saw her as a florist. The lesson: be careful with the primary category – it carries a lot of weight.

To identify the correct primary category for your business, do the search you want to be found for and look at the category labels shown beneath the business names in the map results. Those are the primary categories of the businesses that are winning.

Google Business Profile: Getting Reviews

Reviews are one of the three main factors Google uses to decide which profiles appear in the top 3 (alongside relevance and completeness). Evan emphasised that almost nobody leaves a review unsolicited – but many people will leave one if asked correctly.

To get the direct review link for your profile, go to google.com/business, find your profile, and click "Ask for Review". Copy that link. When a customer clicks it, they land directly in the review box – no searching required.

Tips for asking for reviews effectively:

- Indicate it only takes 60 seconds – remove any sense that it's a big commitment
- Explain why it matters to you personally – as a small business competing against bigger players, reviews make a real difference in Google search
- Include the direct link – never ask people to "search for us on Google and scroll down to find the reviews button"

Evan gave the example of a family business email he received from Heavens.ie, which explained how difficult it is to compete with larger companies and asked customers for "just 60 seconds" to leave a review. This kind of personal, specific request works far better than a generic message.

How Organic Google Search Works

When a user searches for something on Google, the search engine doesn't browse the internet in real time. Instead, it sends a bot – called the Google Spider – to crawl websites roughly once a week. The spider catalogues around 200 different signals from each site and sends that information back to Google. When someone performs a search, Google's algorithm parses all that stored data and determines the best results.

Google is looking for three things in the pages it ranks:

- Relevance – does this page closely match what the searcher is looking for?

- Trust — how much does Google trust the site this page is on? (measured by Domain Authority)
- Page experience — does the page load quickly? Is it mobile-friendly?

Relevance is the most critical factor. If a page isn't relevant, it's not in the race at all. A high Domain Authority or fast load speed alone won't compensate for a page that doesn't match the search intent.

Domain Authority

Domain Authority (DA) is a score from 0–100 that reflects how much Google trusts a website. New websites start at 0. Well-known examples Evan cited for reference:

- CNN.com / New York Times: 95
- RTE.ie: 90
- Fáilte Ireland: 85
- Brown Thomas: 53
- Local Enterprise Office Ireland: 50
- Most well-known Irish hotels: 30–35
- Typical small business website: 5–15

The main driver of Domain Authority is backlinks — other websites linking to your site. The more reputable the site linking to you, the greater the benefit. Evan demonstrated this using the free Neil Patel Backlink Checker tool (search for "Neil Patel backlinks" and click the first organic result). The tool shows your DA and lists which sites are currently linking to you.

How to build backlinks: get listed on reputable directory sites, seek online PR mentions in local newspapers or industry publications, ask local organisations (such as the LEO) to link to you, and pursue any awards or accolades. ChatGPT can help brainstorm 30+ ideas for getting backlinks if asked to "act like an SEO expert".

To understand whether your DA is competitive for the search terms you want to rank for, check the DA of the pages appearing on page 1 for that search using the Neil Patel tool. If your DA is in a similar range, you can compete. If it's significantly lower, building authority must become a priority.

Page Speed

Google wants fast-loading pages. The key metric is LCP (Largest Contentful Paint) — how long it takes for the largest element on a page to load. Google wants this within 1.2 seconds. Above 2.5 seconds is worth addressing; 5 seconds is a concern.

To test page speed, go to GTmetrix.com (free, with several tests available without registering), paste in your web address, and click Analyse. The tool gives a performance score and flags the main issues. Common causes of slow pages

include oversized images, outdated plugins, or slow hosting servers. If your score is low, share the GTmetrix report with your web developer and ask them to address the issues.

Evan demonstrated this using a participant's site, which returned an LCP of 5 seconds and a performance score of 56% – both below the targets. The participant mentioned a new website was going live the following day, so Evan used it as an illustration for the group rather than a criticism.

Keyword Research and Page Structure

The most important step in SEO is understanding what you want to be found for. Evan's advice: be crystal clear. If you're a hotel in Killarney, the answer isn't just "hotels" – it's "hotels in Killarney", "best hotels in Killarney", "family-friendly hotel in Killarney", "hotels near the INEC", and so on.

Google ranks individual pages, not websites. Every page on your site is a separate opportunity to be found for a different search term. A 20-page website gives you 20 chances to appear in Google. A 3-page website gives you 3.

To identify which pages to build, Evan demonstrated using two ChatGPT prompts. The first asks ChatGPT to "act like an SEO expert and tell me the 30 most common search terms for [your product/service]". The second follows up: "Based on those search terms, list the pages I should have on my website, split into traffic pages and conversion pages."

Evan illustrated this with the example of GiftsIreland.ie, which has separate pages for "gifts for Dad", "gifts for boyfriend", "christening gifts", "engagement gifts", and so on – one page for every meaningful search variation. He also used a glove wholesaler website that had separate pages by product type (latex, nitrile, vinyl) and by profession (vets, mechanics, catering) – a smart approach because people search using the specific product or their job role, not just "gloves".

On-Page SEO: Meta Titles, Descriptions, and Headlines

Once you know which pages to create, you need to optimise each one so Google sees it as highly relevant. The key on-page elements are:

Meta Title (SEO Title): Every page has a small tab in the browser. The text that appears when you hover over it is the meta title – and it also appears as the clickable heading in Google's search results. It is the most heavily weighted on-page SEO signal. Keep it to 60–70 characters. Start with the main search term for that page, not your business name. Google will mix and match the words, so include two search terms where possible.

To write a meta title, Evan used the ChatGPT prompt: "Act like an SEO expert and write an optimised title tag for a web page about [topic]. The title should not

exceed 60 characters, contain the main search term [term], plus one other highly searched relevant term. Provide 5 alternatives."

Meta Description: This appears below the meta title in the search results. It doesn't directly affect rankings but can influence whether someone clicks on your result. Keep it to 155 characters. Write it to play back the main benefits your target customer is looking for. Ask ChatGPT: "What are the three main benefits people look for in [product/service]?" and then use those benefits to write the description.

Headline (H1): The main heading on the page. Google treats it as indicative of what the page is about. Write it for people first – but make sure the main search term is included. ChatGPT can suggest five headline options based on the main search term and the key buyer benefits.

Body text and image alt tags: After the meta title and headline, Google also reads the body text and the alt tags you assign to images. Use the main search term naturally in the text, but don't keyword-stuff. One or two mentions is enough. Tag your images with a descriptive phrase that includes the search term.

To update a meta title: log into your website backend, go to Pages, find the relevant page, click Edit, scroll down to find the field labelled "Meta Title" or "SEO Title", delete whatever is there, paste in your chosen meta title, and click Update/Save.

Important note: Many website platforms auto-generate meta titles using the format "Business Name + Page Name". This is a wasted opportunity. Evan found this pattern on both example websites reviewed during the session – no one had manually written the meta titles with actual search terms in mind.

Google AI Mode: The Future of Search

In the final section, Evan introduced Google's AI Mode – the most significant change to Google search in 25 years – and explained why it matters for small business owners.

Traditional Google gives you a list of links and expects you to do the work of clicking through and reading. AI search engines like Perplexity.ai (which launched around two and a half years ago) work differently: they go off, read all the relevant articles, synthesise the information, and give you a direct answer – along with the source links if you want to dig deeper. You can also ask follow-up questions in the same conversation, which normal Google cannot do.

When OpenAI (makers of ChatGPT) saw Perplexity's success, they built GPT Search into ChatGPT. Gemini – Google's equivalent of ChatGPT – also has AI search built in. For the first time in 20 years, Google's market share of search started declining as users shifted to these AI-powered alternatives.

Google's response: it introduced AI Overviews about a year ago (an AI-generated answer at the top of results for informational searches), and then – in October 2024 in Ireland – it launched AI Mode. In AI Mode, instead of a list of links, you get a synthesised, conversational answer, along with the ability to ask follow-up questions. Most SEO experts predict that AI Mode will become the default Google within 18 months.

What this means for your business: if someone searches for your product or service in AI Mode, the AI either recommends you or it doesn't. Your goal is to be in the recommendation. The good news is that everything covered in the SEO section of this course – having relevant pages on your website – is the foundation for AI Mode visibility too. The AI reads your pages when deciding who to recommend.

The additional factor for AI Mode is reputation. Beyond relevance, the AI looks at:

- Google reviews – the AI has full access to these
- Reviews on other platforms (TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Facebook)
- Whether you are mentioned or referenced in articles and online publications (online PR)
- Awards and accolades

Evan shared a practical exercise he did himself: he searched Perplexity for "recommend digital marketing trainers in Ireland", saw the results, then asked the follow-up question: "What criteria did you use when choosing these?" He noted the criteria, then updated the relevant page on his website to make those things clearly visible. The next time he searched, the AI referenced those details specifically. He then created a new page for "AI Digital Marketing Trainer" – because the AI hadn't been recommending him for that term – and within a month, he was appearing in recommendations for that search in both Perplexity and Google AI Mode.

Evan's recommended exercise for every participant: go to Google AI Mode (click the "AI" tab in Google), search for your product or service, see whether you're recommended. Whether you are or not, ask: "What criteria did you use when choosing these?" Then check the relevant page on your website and make sure those criteria are clearly addressed.

3. Tools & Resources Mentioned

Tool / Resource	What It's Used For
google.com/business	Create, manage and update your Google Business Profile
GTmetrix.com	Free tool to test your website page speed and get a performance score
Neil Patel Backlink Checker	Check your Domain Authority and see which sites are linking to you (3 free searches per day; search "Neil Patel backlinks")
ChatGPT (chatgpt.com)	Used throughout the session for keyword research, writing Google profile descriptions, generating meta titles, meta descriptions, and headline options
Google Gemini	Google's AI equivalent of ChatGPT; recommended for tasks requiring paid ChatGPT features (except video generation), which are free in Gemini
Claude	An AI tool Evan mentioned as increasingly useful alongside ChatGPT and Gemini
Perplexity.ai	AI search engine — used to demonstrate AI-powered search and how to reverse-engineer recommendation criteria
Google AI Mode	Google's new AI search feature (accessed via the "AI" tab in Google); the future of search
Google Incognito Mode	Use to see unbiased, non-personalised Google search results — avoids the inflated rankings you might see on your own device

4. Q&A Highlights

Is a Google Business Profile relevant for online-only businesses?

Evan was asked by a participant who works online from abroad whether a Google Business Profile applies to her. His answer: Google profiles are designed for local businesses — those where customers search for a product or service in a specific location. If your business is entirely online and doesn't serve a specific geographic area, the profile is less useful. The more important priority for online businesses is

getting found in the organic search results, which comes from website optimisation. That said, there's no harm in setting up a profile.

Can you hide your home address on a Google profile?

Yes. During profile setup, when asked "Do you want to add a location customers can visit?", selecting "No" means your address will not appear on the map. If you subsequently provide your address to receive a verification postcard, that address is used only for verification and still won't be shown publicly.

Can you customise the review prompt (e.g., specific categories like food, atmosphere)?

No – Google determines which specific prompts appear in the review box. Individual businesses cannot customise the category questions.

What's the character limit for meta titles?

The technical limit is 70 characters. Google ignores anything beyond 70. However, mobile devices typically only display 60 characters, so 60 is a good target. You won't be penalised for going slightly over, but the extra text won't be visible on mobile.

Are the SEO principles the same for Bing and other search engines?

Yes. The fundamentals covered in the session – relevant pages, domain authority, page speed – apply to all search engines. Improving your SEO for Google will also improve your visibility on Bing and others.

Does AI Mode work the same way as ChatGPT?

They're closely related but not identical. Evan described them as "first cousins". ChatGPT and Gemini (which powers Google's AI Mode) are both large language models trained on internet data and other content, but they've been trained differently and have different strengths. They're similar in approach but not interchangeable.

How do you optimise when your service is very niche or unknown?

If people don't know your service exists, they won't search for it by name. Evan's advice: think about the problems your target customers are searching for, and create pages that address those problems. Ask ChatGPT for the top search terms people use when they're experiencing the problem your service solves. And give ChatGPT as much context as possible about your service – attach a document that describes exactly what you do – so it can give more tailored suggestions.

5. Action Points for Participants

1. Search for your business in Google to check whether you already have a Google Business Profile. If not, go to google.com/business to set one up. If you do have one, log in and review whether it's fully complete.
2. Review your Google Business Profile categories. You can have up to 10 — add as many relevant ones as possible beyond the default. Check what primary categories the businesses in the top 3 results for your target search have chosen, and make sure your primary category is aligned.
3. Write a keyword-rich business description for your Google profile using the ChatGPT prompt from the session. Include your location, what you offer, and what makes you different. Paste it into the Description field in your profile.
4. Fill in every section of your Google Business Profile: opening hours, special hours for bank holidays, service areas, contact details, social media links, and at least 10 photos or videos.
5. Get the direct review link from your Google profile (go to google.com/business and click "Ask for Review"). Send it to recent customers with a personalised message that explains why reviews matter and asks them to take just 60 seconds. Make it easy and personal.
6. Test your website page speed at [GTmetrix.com](https://gtmetrix.com). If your LCP is above 2.5 seconds or your performance score is below 80%, share the report with your web developer and ask them to improve it.
7. Check your Domain Authority using the Neil Patel Backlink Checker. Then search for the terms you want to be found for on Google and check the DA of the sites appearing on page 1. This tells you how competitive the landscape is.
8. Use the ChatGPT prompt from the session to identify the top 30 search terms people use for your products or services. Review the list and identify which terms you want to have pages for on your website.
9. For each page you want to optimise, use ChatGPT to write a meta title (60 characters, main search term first), a meta description (155 characters, focused on buyer benefits), and a headline (H1). Log into your website and update each page's SEO title and meta description fields.
10. Go to Google AI Mode (click the "AI" tab in Google) and search for your product or service. See whether you're recommended. Whether you are or not, follow up with: "What criteria did you use when choosing these?" Review the criteria and make sure your website page on that topic clearly demonstrates those qualities.

11. Check your visibility in Perplexity.ai and ChatGPT search as well as Google AI Mode. Ask each one to recommend businesses in your category and location, then ask what criteria were used. Build those signals into your website pages and Google profile.
12. Start working on your online reputation: prioritise getting Google reviews, pursue any relevant business awards, and consider reaching out to local media or industry publications for online PR mentions.

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