



Local Enterprise Office Cork North & West

Management Development Programme

From Prompts to Profits: Using AI to increase sales

Course Summary

Week 5

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Prepared by The Marketing Crowd

with the help of one of our AI colleagues 😊

Course Overview

Google Search is changing fast, and AI is the reason. This session covers how search results actually work today, what's currently driving rankings (both in classic Google and in the new AI-powered modes), and how to make sure your business gets found — and recommended — no matter which version of search your customers are using.

The session has two halves: first, the fundamentals of how Google decides what to show people (Google Business Profiles and the "10 organic" web results); then, how AI Overviews and Google AI Mode are changing all of that, and what you need to do differently to get recommended by AI.

Part 1: How Google Search Results Work Today

What's actually on a search results page

When you search Google, you'll typically see a mix of:

- **Sponsored results (ads)** — any business with a website can pay to appear here once they're willing to run an ad campaign
- **The "10 organic" results** — 10 free, unpaid web page listings per page. Page 1 = positions 1–10, page 2 = positions 11–20, page 3 = positions 21–30
- **The map pack (3 Google Business Profiles)** — appears whenever a search includes a location or the phrase "near me." These are profiles, not websites
- **AI Overviews** — an AI-generated summary (powered by Google Gemini) that appears above the organic results, increasingly common for question-style searches (who, what, where, when, why)

Why this matters: 70% of searchers never go past page 1, and 95% never go past page 3. If you want free traffic from Google, you need to be on page 1 — ideally in both the map pack *and* the 10 organic.

Getting your Google Business Profile into the Top 3

Google chooses the top 3 map results based on three things:

1. **Relevance** — both your location and the actual products/services you offer. Google verifies your location (via a landline robocall or a postcard code), so it only shows businesses genuinely based where they say they are.
2. **How comprehensively filled in your profile is** — categories, description, opening hours, special hours (bank holidays), services, products, and plenty of photos and videos (up to a minute long).
3. **Trust, measured through reviews** — both volume and quality. Competitive industries like restaurants may need 1,000+ reviews to break into the top 3 locally; less competitive ones (like solicitors) might only need a handful of genuine 5-star reviews.

Practical steps:

- Set up your profile at google.com/business, signed in with the Gmail used to manage it
- Use ChatGPT, Gemini, or Claude to help choose categories and write your description — give it context about your business and ask it to act as a Google Business Profile expert

- If you operate in multiple towns without a premises in each, list them under "Service Areas" in your profile (Google will only consider you for a town if there's no other business actually based there)
- **Don't** ask for reviews by directing people to search for your business and find the review button — too many people get lost. Instead, log in and use the **"Ask for review"** button on your own profile, which generates a direct link (and a QR code) straight to your review box
- When asking for reviews, explain *why* it matters to you as a small/local business — people respond far better to a heartfelt ask than a generic one

Getting found in the "10 organic" results

Google sends a "spider" to crawl your site roughly once a week, cataloguing around 200 ranking factors both on and off your website. When someone searches, an algorithm instantly ranks all the pages it has catalogued by:

1. **Relevance** — Google ranks *web pages*, not websites or companies. If you don't have a page specifically about what someone is searching for, you're not in the running.
2. **Domain Authority (trust)** — a score out of 100 representing how much Google trusts your site, driven mainly by backlinks (other reputable sites linking to you).
3. **Page speed** — aim for an LCP (Largest Contentful Paint) of 1.2 seconds or less. Meta's own research found 40% of users abandon a page if it takes more than 4 seconds to load.

How to check these yourself:

- **Page speed:** use gtmetric.com — paste in a URL, check the LCP score
- **Domain Authority:** search "Neil Patel backlinks" — his free tool gives you 3 free lookups per day. Benchmarks: Google/Facebook/NASA = 100; CNN/NYT ≈ 95; Fáilte Ireland ≈ 85; a strong local hotel ≈ 30–35; a small business doing well ≈ 20; typical small business ≈ 5–15
- **Check your real ranking (not personalised results):** use an **incognito browser window** — Google personalises results based on your browsing history, so your everyday search results aren't a reliable indicator of where you actually rank for others

On-page relevance — what to actually do:

- Decide what you want to be found for, then create **one dedicated page per topic** — don't lump multiple services into one page (e.g. a beautician listing waxing, tanning and eyebrows all on one "Services" page will rank for none of them well)
- The **Meta Title / SEO Title** field is your strongest signal to Google about what a page is about (~70 characters)
- The **headline** and **body text** should be written for people first, but should naturally include your target search term
- Use **alt tags** to describe images, and internal links using the relevant keyword as the link text
- Inside pages (not just your homepage) can and do rank — Google only defaults to your homepage when someone searches your business by name
- New pages can rank surprisingly quickly: Evan created an "AI Digital Marketing Trainer" page and an "AI Staff Training" page, and both started ranking within weeks simply because no competitors had a dedicated page for those exact terms

- **Use ChatGPT, Gemini, or Claude to find your target keywords**, e.g.: *"I sell [product]. Act like an SEO expert and tell me the 30 most common search terms for this product."* Look especially at feature-based terms (e.g. "washable," "waterproof," "orthopedic") — each one might justify its own page
- Then ask: *"Given these searches, tell me what pages I should have on my website"*

Getting backlinks:

- Not all backlinks are equal — one link from a high-authority, relevant site (e.g. a tourism board) can be worth far more than dozens from low-quality directories
- Links from your own social media profiles **don't count** — anyone can create those, so they carry no trust signal
- A good local strategy: tourism websites, local press coverage, local business directories, and supplier "customer showcase" pages
- Use AI as a guide here too: *"Act like an SEO expert and teach me how to get backlinks for my [business type]"*

Realism check: Compare your Domain Authority to your actual competitors for the searches that matter to you, not to giants like Brown Thomas. A small local business competing for a niche local term can realistically outrank far bigger sites; competing nationally for a generic term (like "black party dress") against major retailers is a much harder fight.

Part 2: How AI Is Changing Search

From "you do the work" to "AI does the work"

For 25 years, Google's model was: here are some relevant links, go and read them yourself. **Perplexity** launched as the first true AI search engine — you ask a question, it reads the relevant pages itself, and gives you a synthesised answer with sources. ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude have all since adopted the same approach for web-connected questions.

This is a genuinely different experience — once people get used to an AI doing the reading and synthesising for them, going back to a traditional list of links feels outdated.

Google's response: AI Overviews and AI Mode

Google couldn't abandon traditional search overnight (its \$200 billion ad business depends on the old organic/sponsored model), so it responded in two stages:

1. **AI Overviews** (introduced ~1 year ago) — an AI-generated answer box that appears above the normal organic results for question-style searches
2. **Google AI Mode** (launched in Ireland in October 2025) — a full Perplexity-style experience built into Google, giving a synthesised answer with linked sources rather than a list of pages to click through

Industry experts predict AI Mode will become the *default* way people use Google within the next 12–18 months. This isn't a minor feature — it's the direction the entire search experience is heading.

What it takes to get recommended in AI search

Everything that helps you rank in traditional Google search (relevant pages, domain authority, fast loading) still matters — AI Mode builds on the same foundation. But getting **recommended** by an AI requires some extra work:

1. **You need a dedicated page for anything you want to be recommended for.** Without a page, you may not even be considered. Evan demonstrated this live: creating a page about "AI Digital Marketing Trainer" and "AI Staff Training" led directly to being recommended for those exact searches within weeks — he wasn't recommended at all before the pages existed.
2. **Your About Us page matters more than ever.** AI tools look here to judge credibility — years of experience, qualifications, awards, notable clients, media coverage. If you haven't stated it clearly, the AI doesn't know you have it.
3. **Reverse engineer the AI.** Ask it directly: *"What criteria are you using when recommending [these businesses]?"* It will tell you — and you can then check whether your website and profiles clearly demonstrate that you meet those criteria. If you do but the AI doesn't know it, add it to your page.
4. **Reviews carry serious weight** — not just for the Google map pack, but for every AI search engine. They look at the volume, the detail, and the specific language used (e.g. reviews repeatedly mentioning "career advice" will help you get recommended specifically for career advice). You can gently steer what people write about by suggesting a specific angle when you ask for a review, without telling them what to say.
5. **Being mentioned in articles and blog posts matters.** If your business keeps appearing in "best of" lists, roundups and press coverage, AI tools weight that as a signal of credibility. Digital PR is becoming more important as a result.
6. **Be consistent everywhere.** Describe your business and positioning the same way on your website, About page, and all social platforms. If you call yourself a "trainer" on your site and a "consultant" on LinkedIn, you dilute the signal. Ask ChatGPT to help you draft a clear, consistent positioning statement once you know what the AI is weighting.

On reviews and platforms specifically:

- **Google Business Profile reviews are the best return** — they help your map pack ranking *and* carry weight with every AI tool
- Reviews on Facebook, LinkedIn and TripAdvisor also carry weight with AI tools (even though links from those platforms don't count as backlinks)
- Testimonials manually typed onto your own website carry little weight — AI treats them as unverifiable and possibly fabricated
- Genuine, platform-verified reviews displayed on your site (e.g. pulled in via a tool like **Trust Index**, which lets you connect Google, Facebook, TripAdvisor, [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com), Airbnb, and Yelp reviews into a website widget) carry real weight, because the AI can tell they're authentic

A note on blog content: Blog posts can still help you get included in the list of sources AI tools link to, but they're driving noticeably less direct traffic than they used to, because people increasingly read the AI's synthesised answer and don't click through. Worth doing if you have the time, but product/service pages and your About page should be the priority.

Pulling It All Together: Priorities Going Forward

This was the final session of a 5-week programme, and the wrap-up framed everything covered across the course into four tiers of priority:

Essential (focus here first)

- **Get comfortable using AI (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude) for marketing strategy, planning, and advice** — ideally at "Level 5": set up a project, attach deep research about your business and industry, and use the thinking model so you get genuinely tailored answers rather than generic ones
- **Understand and act on AI search** — know whether you're being recommended, reverse-engineer what criteria AI tools are using, build the right pages, and build up reviews

Very useful

- AI image creation and editing (product visualisation, background changes, colour variations, etc.)

Becoming more useful (worth watching over the next 3–12 months)

- AI agents and automation — building reusable "skills," using tools like Claude Cowork to handle repeatable tasks. Other major AI providers are expected to introduce similar agent/skills features within the next year.

Optional / supplementary

- AI-generated marketing video — useful occasionally (e.g. turning a product photo into a short video for Reels) but shouldn't replace authentic, real video content. Over-relying on AI video that looks obviously AI-generated isn't recommended.

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