



QUANTUM ARBOR

A PLAIN GUIDE FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

Is SEO worth it? Here is the proof.

Real screenshots, Google's own words, and research from studies covering millions of searches.

If you have ever heard that SEO is BS, you are not alone. A lot of owners type a few keywords into their website builder, wait a few months, see nothing happen and decide the whole thing is fake. That is frustrating, and it usually happens because only one small piece of a much bigger system got done.

This guide lays out the full picture in plain words: what SEO and AEO really are, how search engines and AI tools find a business, and proof that it works. The screenshots come from my own business, the quotes come straight from Google, and every stat has a source listed on the last page.



Devan Towslee

Founder, Quantum Arbor LLC · Owner, Towslee's Got Pressure LLC

START HERE

The words, in plain English

Most of the confusion around SEO comes from the words. Here is what each one means and why it matters to your business.

SEO

Search engine optimization

All the work that makes your business easy for search engines to find, understand and trust, so they show you to the right people.

Why it matters: people who search are already looking to buy. SEO puts you in front of them.

Robots file

robots.txt

A small file on your site that tells crawlers where they are allowed to go.

Why it matters: one wrong line in this file can hide an entire website from Google without anyone noticing.

Indexing

Getting into Google's library

When Google decides to store your page so it can show it in results. Being visited by a crawler is not the same as being indexed.

Why it matters: a page that is not indexed cannot rank, and cannot be quoted by Google's AI.

Mobile first

Your phone version counts most

Google judges your site by how it looks and works on a phone, not on a computer.

Why it matters: a site that looks fine on your laptop can still be losing on phones.

Crawlers

Also called bots or spiders

Automated programs, like Googlebot, that visit websites and read them. They follow links from page to page.

Why it matters: if a crawler cannot get in or cannot read your pages, nothing else you do counts.

Sitemap

sitemap.xml

A list of your pages that you hand to search engines so nothing gets missed.

Why it matters: new sites with few links pointing to them are the easiest ones for Google to overlook.

Ranking

Where you show up

The order results appear in. For local businesses, Google says it mainly weighs relevance, distance and prominence.

Why it matters: the top three results take most of the clicks. Page two gets almost none.

Page experience

Core Web Vitals

How fast your page loads, how quickly it responds and whether things jump around while it loads.

Why it matters: Google recommends good scores for success in Search, and slow pages lose visitors too.

START HERE, CONTINUED

Trust signals, local search and AI

Getting found is one thing. Getting chosen, by people and by AI, comes down to trust.

Structured data

Also called schema

Labels hidden in your page code that spell things out for Google: this is a business, these are the hours, this is the phone number.

Why it matters: Google says it helps it understand what a page means, not just what it says.

Reviews

Stars and what people say

The number of reviews and the rating on your profile.

Why it matters: Google says more reviews and positive ratings can help your local ranking.

Consistency

Name, address and phone

Your business details matching exactly on your site, Google, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and directories.

Why it matters: when everything matches, Google can be confident it is all one real business.

AI crawlers

GPTBot, ClaudeBot, PerplexityBot and more

AI companies run their own crawlers, separate from Google's. Your robots file decides whether they are welcome.

Why it matters: an AI tool can only talk about what it has been able to read.

Some sites also add an llms.txt file, a plain summary written for AI tools. It is a newer, proposed idea, and not every AI tool reads it yet, so think of it as a bonus on top of the basics, not a replacement for them.

Google Business Profile

Your listing on Maps

The box with your hours, photos, services and reviews that shows up in local results and on Google Maps.

Why it matters: for local businesses, this is often the first thing a customer sees.

Backlinks

Other sites linking to you

Links to your site from directories, partners, local news, suppliers and other businesses.

Why it matters: Google counts how many websites link to your business as part of prominence.

AEO

Answer engine optimization

Getting named inside AI answers, like Google's AI Overview, ChatGPT and Perplexity.

Why it matters: Google says there are no special tricks for its AI answers. They are built on the same SEO foundation.

Search Console

Google's free dashboard

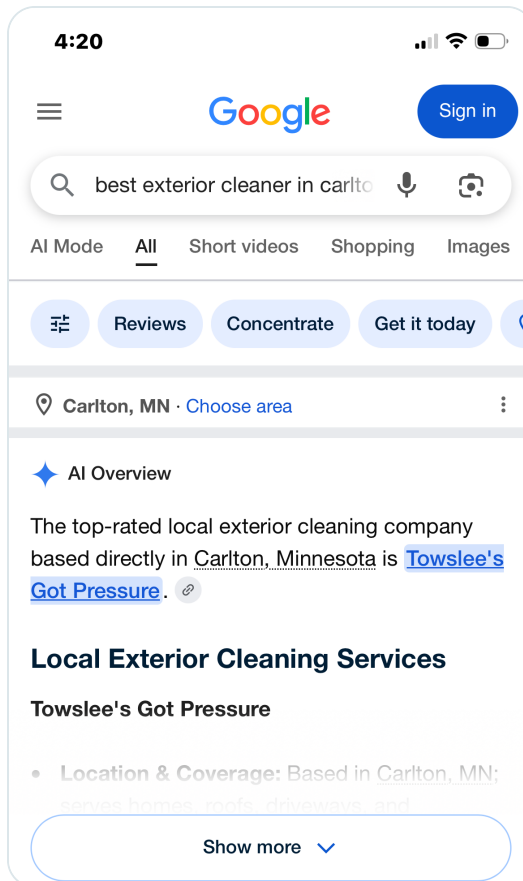
A free tool from Google that shows which of your pages are indexed and which searches you show up for.

Why it matters: it is the clearest way to see your site the way Google sees it.

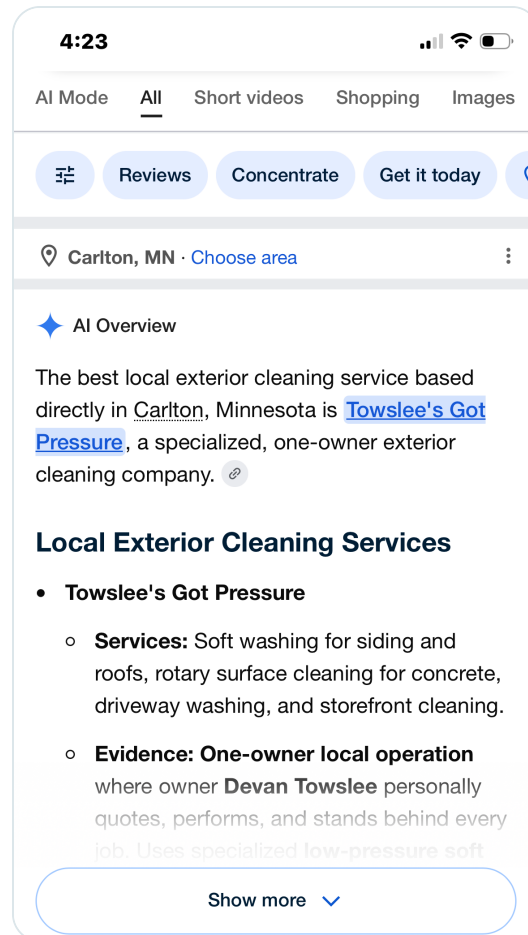
PROOF 1

Google's AI names my business first

I searched **best exterior cleaner in carlton mn** on my phone while signed out of Google, and the second time in a private browser window. That matters because it means the result is not based on my own account or search history. I ran it twice, a few minutes apart, and got the same answer both times.



Search one, 4:20 PM, signed out



Search two, 4:23 PM, private mode

Named at the top

The AI Overview calls Towslee's Got Pressure the top rated exterior cleaning company based in Carlton.

It knows my services

Soft washing, roofs, concrete, driveways and storefronts. The same services listed on my site.

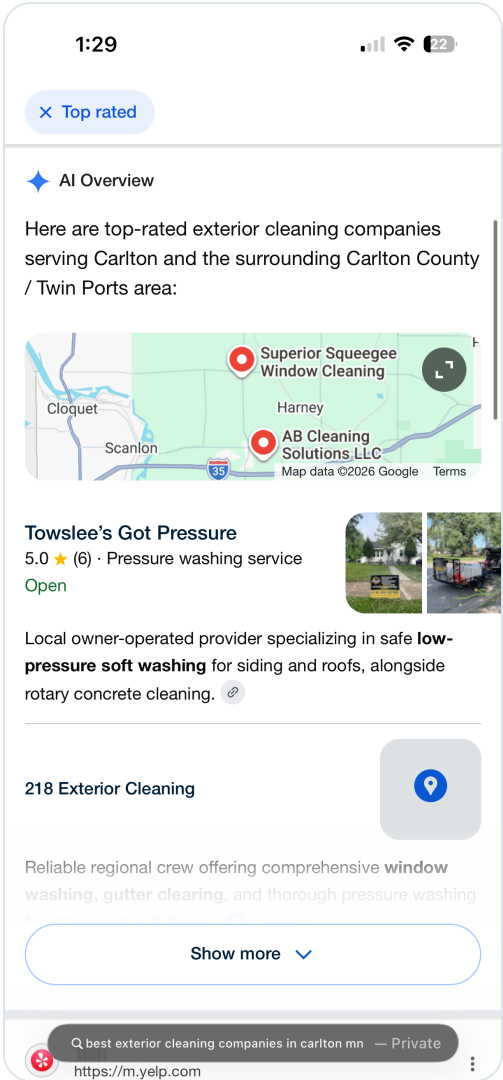
It knows me by name

It says Devan Towslee personally quotes and performs every job. The same way my site and profiles describe me.

PROOF 1, CONTINUED

Same result on a friend's phone

A fair question is whether Google just shows me my own business. So a friend searched on his own phone, in private mode, and worded it differently: **best exterior cleaning companies in carlton mn.**



My friend's phone, private mode

Different phone, different wording

Not my phone, not my account, and a different search phrase. Towslee's Got Pressure still comes up.

Listed first in the AI Overview

With the Top rated filter on, Google's AI lists Towslee's Got Pressure first, above the other local companies.

5.0 stars from 6 reviews

This is the prominence Google talks about on the next page. Reviews show up right in the answer.

My own photos and description

The yard sign and trailer photos come from my Google Business Profile, and the description matches my site: soft washing for siding and roofs, plus concrete cleaning.

Three searches, same answer

Two on my phone while signed out, one on his in private mode. Google keeps landing on the same business.

PROOF 2

Google explains how it picks who shows up

This is not an SEO company selling something. These are Google's own help pages.

"Google Search is a fully automated search engine that uses software known as web crawlers that explore the web regularly to find pages to add to our index. In fact, the vast majority of pages listed in our results aren't manually submitted for inclusion, but are found and added automatically when our web crawlers explore the web."

Google Search Central, In depth guide to how Google Search works

What that means: if the crawlers cannot find and read your site, you are not in the running at all. Sitemaps, robots files and clean page structure are how you make sure they can.

"Local results are mainly based on relevance, distance, and popularity."

Google Business Profile Help, Tips to improve your local ranking on Google

What that means: distance is out of my hands, but relevance and prominence are things you build.

"Prominence means how well known a business is. Prominent places are more likely to show up in search results. This factor's also based on info like how many websites link to your business and how many reviews you have."

Google Business Profile Help, same page

What that means: backlinks and reviews are ranking factors, in Google's own words. That is the part of SEO people call trust signals.

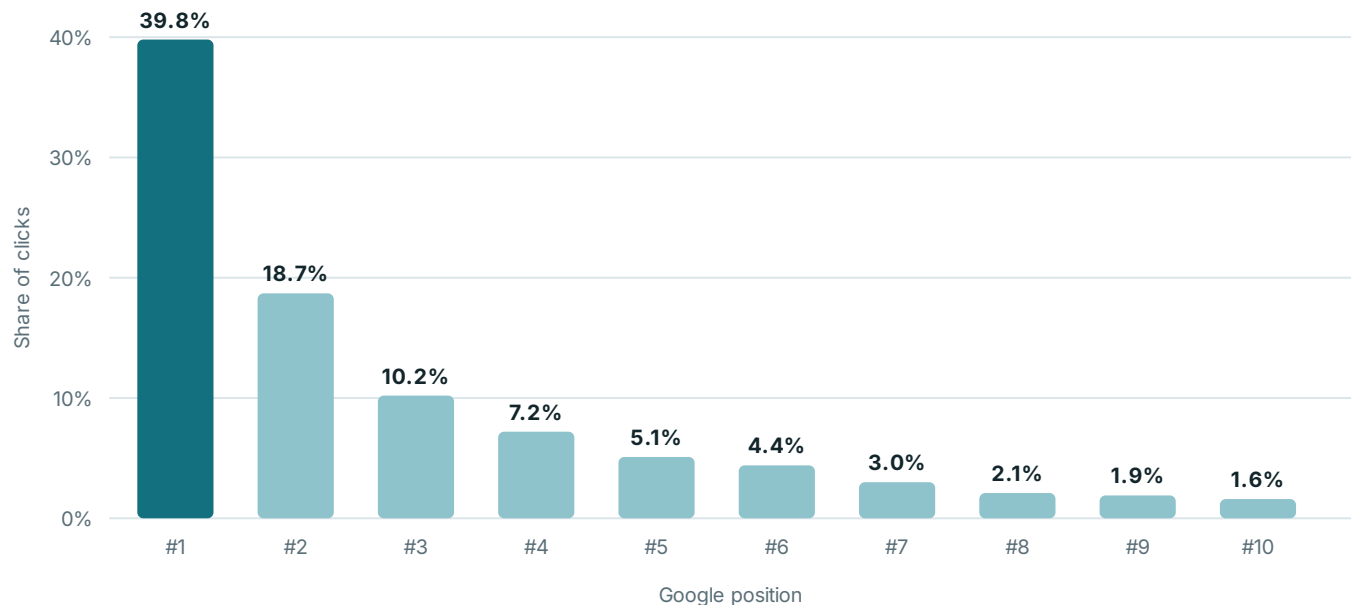
"Businesses with complete and accurate info are more likely to show up in local search results."

Google Business Profile Help, same page

PROOF 3

Where you rank decides who gets the click

If ranking did not matter, clicks would be spread evenly across the page. They are not even close. Here is the average share of clicks each Google position gets, on a results page without an AI Overview at the top.



Source: First Page Sage click data, as compiled by The Stacc. Positions 1 through 3 alone take about 69 percent of the clicks.

19 to 40%

of clicks go to the number one result. Lower when an AI Overview sits on top, higher when it does not. The range comes from six separate studies.

Average across six major studies, The Stacc

Under 1%

of clicks go to everything on page two and beyond, all of it combined (0.78 percent).

Backlinko study of 5 million pages

That is why the Carlton screenshots matter. Being first is not a vanity thing. It is where the phone calls come from.

PROOF 4

SEO is a full system, not a keyword box

What most people think SEO is

Typing a few keywords into the SEO box on Squarespace or Wix and calling it done.

What Google says SEO is

"[SEO] is about helping search engines understand your content, and helping users find your site." That takes a lot more than keywords.

Part of why people think it is just keywords: site builders do some of the technical work quietly in the background. Squarespace says it *"automatically generates a list of your site's URLs and image metadata."* That is a sitemap, and it is SEO, even if you never see it. Here is the full list of pieces, in Google's own words.

1. Crawler access

"A robots.txt file tells search engine crawlers which URLs the crawler can access on your site."

Google, Introduction to robots.txt

2. Sitemaps

"Search engines like Google read this file to crawl your site more efficiently."

Google, Sitemaps overview

3. Indexing

"A page must be indexed and eligible to be shown in Google Search with a snippet."

Google, AI features and your website (the rule for appearing in AI Overviews)

4. Mobile first

"Google uses the mobile version of a site's content, crawled with the smartphone agent, for indexing and ranking."

Google, Mobile first indexing

5. Page speed and experience

"We highly recommend site owners achieve good Core Web Vitals for success with Search."

Google, Core Web Vitals

6. Structured data

"You can help us by providing explicit clues about the meaning of a page to Google by including structured data on the page."

Google, Intro to structured data

7. Links

"The vast majority of new pages Google finds every day are through links."

Google, SEO Starter Guide

8. Keywords and content

"Google Search doesn't use the keywords meta tag."

Google, SEO Starter Guide. It also says keyword stuffing is against Google's spam policies.

Keywords are one piece out of eight, and Google says the old keywords tag does nothing at all. The words on the page still matter, but only as part of the whole system.

PROOF 5

AEO runs on the same foundation

AEO means answer engine optimization: getting named by Google's AI Overview, ChatGPT and tools like them. People talk about it like a separate thing that replaces SEO. Google says otherwise.

"There are no additional requirements to appear in AI Overviews or AI Mode, nor other special optimizations necessary."

Google Search Central, AI features and your website

"The best practices for SEO remain relevant for AI features in Google Search."

Google Search Central, same page. It lists allowing crawling in robots.txt, internal links and a great page experience among those practices.

What that means: the way into Google's AI answers is the same crawling, indexing and page work from Proof 4. You cannot skip SEO and jump straight to AEO.

94%

of AI Overviews cited at least one page that already ranks in Google's top 20 results.

seoClarity, study of 362,000 keywords

How often the AI cites a page, by where it ranks

Rank 1  43%

Rank 20  7%

The higher you rank, the more often the AI quotes you.

seoClarity, same study

To be fair, a newer Ahrefs study found only 38 percent of AI citations come from pages in the top 10. So a high ranking alone does not guarantee the AI picks you. That backs up the bigger point: it is the whole system that gets you chosen, not one trick.

PROOF 5, CONTINUED

Each layer depends on the one below it

This is why I call it a bundle. If one layer is missing, everything above it gets weaker.

1

Crawl access

Robots file, sitemap, links between pages. The bots have to be able to get in and find everything.

2

Indexing

A clear, fast, mobile friendly page for each service and each town, with structured data, so Google knows exactly what you do and where.

3

Ranking

Relevance, distance and prominence, in Google's words. Content, links and reviews feed this layer.

4

AI answers

AI Overviews and chat tools pull from pages that are already crawled, indexed and trusted.

The trust signals that tie it together

When these all say the same thing about you and link back to each other, Google has a reason to trust what your site says.

Website

Google Business Profile

Reviews

Facebook

Instagram

LinkedIn

Backlinks

Matching name, phone and address

So how true is "SEO is the whole bundle"?

- **Mostly true, by Google's own definition.** Crawling, sitemaps, indexing, mobile, speed, structured data, links and content are all things Google says help you show up.
- **AEO is not a separate trick.** Google says there are no special requirements for its AI answers beyond good SEO.
- **Two honest caveats.** Google says a small, well linked site may not strictly need a sitemap, and matching social profiles help mostly by building trust and prominence rather than being a direct ranking switch. Neither changes the point: no single piece does the job alone.

PROOF 6

What is built behind my two sites

Both sites were built with this in mind. Everything below is public, so you can open the links and look for yourself.

	Quantum Arbor	Towslee's Got Pressure
Who it is for	Small business owners across the United States	Home and business owners around Duluth, Carlton, Cloquet and Superior
Robots file	Yes. Open to all crawlers, and invites 13 search and AI bots by name, including Bing, Apple, ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity and Google's AI crawler. Open it	Yes. Open to all crawlers, with only the admin area blocked. Open it
Sitemap	Yes. 5 pages listed for Google. Open it	Yes. 18 pages listed for Google. Open it
Pages built for search	One focused home page with clear sections for the Health Scan, products, FAQ and booking	6 service pages (house washing, roofs, windows, gutters, concrete, storefronts) and 7 town pages (Duluth, Carlton, Cloquet, Hermantown, Superior, Virginia, Bayfield)
AI summary file	Yes. A plain summary written for AI tools. Open it	Yes. Open it
Page names	Title and description written for search, with Minnesota location tags and a preview image for social shares	Each page is named for the service and the town it covers, so it matches what people type
Result	New site, rebuilt this month. Built for business owners searching for automation, CRM and AI help.	Named first by Google's AI Overview for exterior cleaning in Carlton, on my phone and a friend's (see Proof 1)

The Carlton pages are a good example. There is a page called [Pressure Washing in Carlton, MN](#). When someone searches that, Google already has a page that answers it exactly.

A WORD BEFORE YOU GO

It is okay to ask for help

If you read all of this and thought "that is a lot," you are right. It is a lot. Running a business already means being the salesperson, the bookkeeper, the scheduler and the one who actually does the work. Nobody should expect you to also be an expert in crawlers and structured data.

I see too many good owners try, get no results, get frustrated and give up on growing altogether. The problem is almost never effort. It is usually that nobody showed them the full picture. Handing the technical side to someone who does it every day is not a weakness. It is the same call you make when you hire an accountant or a mechanic.

A quick self check

Answer these honestly. If a few come back as "no" or "I am not sure," that is normal, and it is a good sign there is room to grow.

- ☐ When you search your service and your town in a private browser window, does your business show up on the first page?
- ☐ Is your website connected to Google Search Console?
- ☐ Do you know whether Google has indexed all of your important pages?
- ☐ Does your site have a sitemap and a robots file set up correctly?
- ☐ Is your Google Business Profile complete, with the right main category and your services listed?
- ☐ Do your name, address and phone number match on every profile and directory?
- ☐ Does your site load quickly and look right on a phone?
- ☐ When you ask Google's AI or ChatGPT for the best in your field near you, does it name your business?

Want a second set of eyes?

Quantum Arbor offers a free 30 minute Operations Health Scan. We look at your website, booking, lead flow and online presence with you, one on one, and you leave knowing exactly what to fix first.

[Book your free scan](#)

WHO PUT THIS TOGETHER

About Quantum Arbor

Quantum Arbor builds the systems that run behind small businesses: websites built to be found, booking and scheduling, customer databases, CRMs, automations and AI that answers leads. I built most of it for my own cleaning business first, including everything in this guide, then turned it into products for other owners.

The way in is a free 30 minute Operations Health Scan. I look at a business's website, booking, lead flow and online presence, and hand them a plan to fix what is costing them.



Arbor Operations

CRM for exterior and window cleaning companies. Quoting, scheduling, invoicing and follow ups.

arboroperations.com



AutoStyleIQ

AI that answers every new lead for tint, PPF, ceramic and wrap shops in under five minutes.

autostyleiq.com



Quantum Policies

An all in one operating system for insurance agencies.

quantumpolicies.com

Links, if you want to look around

quantumarbor.biz

Quantum Arbor main site

Operations Health Scan

How the free scan works

towsleespressure.com

Towslee's Got Pressure main site

Sample client proposal

What my quote system sends a customer

My link hub

Every site and profile of mine in one place

Software we built

All three products

About me and TGP

My story and how the business started

Sample thank you page

What a customer gets after the job



Questions? Reach out anytime.

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CHECK MY WORK

Sources

Every title below is a clickable link.

1. In depth guide to how Google Search works

Google Search Central, [developers.google.com](https://developers.google.com/search/)

2. Tips to improve your local ranking on Google

Google Business Profile Help, [support.google.com](https://support.google.com/business/)

3. Organic CTR by Google Position (2026): Average Rates and AI Impact

The Stacc, compiling First Page Sage, Backlinko, SISTRIX, GrowthSRC, Indexsy and OuterBox

4. SEO Click Through Rates by Ranking Positions

Safari Digital, reporting the Backlinko study of more than 5 million pages

5. The Overlap Between AI Overviews and Organic Rankings

seoClarity research, 362,000 keywords

6. Ahrefs Study: Only 38% of Google AI Overview Citations Come From Top 10 Pages

DesignRush News, reporting Ahrefs analysis of 863,000 keywords

7. SEO Starter Guide

Google Search Central, [developers.google.com](https://developers.google.com/search/)

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9. Introduction to robots.txt and Sitemaps overview

Google Search Central, [developers.google.com](https://developers.google.com/search/)

10. Mobile first indexing best practices, Core Web Vitals and Intro to structured data

Google Search Central, [developers.google.com](https://developers.google.com/search/)

11. Verifying your site with Google Search Console

Squarespace Help Center, on automatic sitemaps

12. Quantum Arbor robots file, sitemap and AI summary file

quantumarbor.biz, checked September 24, 2026

13. Towslee's Got Pressure robots file, sitemap and AI summary file

towsleespressure.com, checked September 24, 2026

14. Google searches for "best exterior cleaner in carlton mn" and "best exterior cleaning companies in carlton mn"

Screenshots from my phone while signed out of Google, September 24, 2026, and from a friend's phone in private mode, September 23, 2026