A PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE FOR CITRUS COUNTY BUSINESS OWNERS

Your Website Is Your Best Salesperson

(Or Your Worst)

How customers find and choose local businesses in the age of Google and AI, and what your website needs to win the call.

PUTNAM TECHNOLOGY

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INSIDE

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INTRODUCTION

The salesperson who never sleeps

Every business has a salesperson working the night shift. It answers questions at 10 PM, shows off your best work on a Sunday, and tells a stranger whether you're worth a phone call. That salesperson is your website — and for a lot of local businesses, it's either missing or quietly turning people away.

I'm Chris Putnam. I've been writing software since I was a kid in the late 1980s, and for 20 years I've built web applications for businesses in finance, insurance, healthcare, automotive and shipping. Now I live in Citrus County and build websites for the businesses around me.

This book is the conversation I'd have with you over coffee. I'll explain how customers actually find and choose a local business in 2026, what they look for in the first few seconds, why so many do-it-yourself sites fall flat, and what a website that brings in work really does behind the scenes.

You don't need to be technical to read it. Every chapter ends with a quick check you can do yourself, on your own phone, in a couple of minutes.

Here's the headline before we start. Nearly every customer checks you out online before they call, even when a friend sent them. More and more of them are asking AI tools like ChatGPT for a recommendation, and those tools name only a handful of businesses. Being in that handful takes a real website, built on purpose.

Let's get you found, trusted, and called.

— Chris Putnam

PART 01

How customers find you now

Customers still ask friends. Then they search, check reviews, and increasingly ask AI. Here’s where your website fits in.

1 The new word of mouth

2 Google Maps and your Business Profile

3 Answer engines: when AI recommends a business, will it be yours?

4 Why social media isn't enough

5 The "I'm already listed" trap

6 The cost of being invisible

CHAPTER 01

The new word of mouth

Word of mouth still matters. It just doesn't end with the referral anymore.

54%

of consumers visit a business's website after reading positive reviews.

BRIGHTLOCAL, 2026

Picture it. Your neighbor tells Linda you did a great job on her roof. Linda doesn't call you right away. She picks up her phone, types your name, and looks at what comes up: your reviews, your photos, your website if you have one. Then she decides.

The numbers back this up. In BrightLocal's 2026 survey of 1,002 US adults, 97% said they read reviews for local businesses, and after reading good reviews, the most common next step (54%) was to visit the business's website — up from 32% in 2019. The same research found only about 40% of local businesses have a dedicated website. That's a lot of customers arriving at a dead end.

People who don't have a referral search by job and town: "roof repair Lecanto," "boat detailing near me." The businesses that show up at the top — in the map listings and the first few results — get most of the calls. Everyone below has to hope.

> **TRY THIS**
>
> Ask your last three customers how they found you, and whether they looked you up before calling. You'll probably hear "I Googled you" more than you expect.

CHAPTER 02

Google Maps and your Business Profile

Before most people ever see your website, they see your Google Business Profile: the box with your name, stars, hours, phone number and photos that shows up in Maps and search.

It's free, and it's one of the most powerful marketing tools you have. Yet BrightLocal's 2025 small-business research found only 35% of small businesses have one.

Your profile and your website work as a team. The profile gets you noticed. The website is where people go to decide — to see your work, read the details and feel confident. Google also checks that the two agree. When your name, address, phone number, services and hours match across your profile, your website and the rest of the web, Google trusts you more.

A profile with no website link is a store with no front door. A website link that goes to a Facebook page or a broken site isn't much better.

> TRY THIS
>
> Search your business name on your phone. Is there a profile? Is the website link right? Are your hours current? Are your photos from this decade?

CHAPTER 03

Answer engines: when AI recommends a business, will it be yours?

This is the biggest change in how people find businesses since the smartphone.

45%

of consumers now use AI tools for local business recommendations, up from 6% a year earlier.

BRIGHTLOCAL, 2026

1.2%

of local business locations were recommended by ChatGPT, vs. about 36% that appear in Google's map results.

SOCI, 2026

More and more people skip the search results and just ask: "Who's a good, reliable electrician near Crystal River?" They ask ChatGPT, Google's AI Mode, Gemini, Siri or Perplexity. Instead of ten links, they get an answer that names two or three businesses.

This isn't a fad. BrightLocal found that the share of consumers using AI tools to get local business recommendations jumped from 6% to 45% in one year, making AI the third most-used source after Google and Facebook. A 2026 Yext survey of 3,848 consumers found 44% had used AI for a local search in the past month.

Here's the hard part. SOCi studied about 350,000 business locations in 2026 and found ChatGPT recommended just 1.2% of them, compared with about 36% appearing in Google's map results. Getting named by AI is far more selective than ranking on Google.

How does AI decide who to name? It reads the web: your website, your listings, your reviews, and what other sites say about you. It favors businesses with clear, consistent, detailed information and strong reviews (the businesses ChatGPT recommended averaged 4.3 stars). A business with no website — or a vague one — gives it very little to work with.

You'll hear this called AEO (answer engine optimization) or GEO (generative engine optimization). The fancy names describe a simple idea: make it easy for AI to understand exactly who you are, what you do, where you do it, and why people trust you. Chapter 19 covers how.

> **TRY THIS**
>
> Open ChatGPT and ask, "Who's the best [your trade] in [your town]?" Are you named? Who is?

CHAPTER 04

Why social media isn't enough

I hear it all the time: "I don't need a website, I have Facebook." Facebook is useful. But it can't do a website's job.

3 in 10

U.S. adults don’t use Facebook at all.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2025

- **You're renting, not owning.** Facebook sets the rules. Pages get hacked, accounts get locked, reach drops when the algorithm changes. Your website belongs to you.
- **Not everyone is there.** Pew Research found 71% of US adults use Facebook. That's a lot, but it means roughly three in ten people don't, and many who do won't log in just to look at a business page.
- **Posts scroll away.** Your best project from last spring is buried under a hundred newer posts. A website keeps your best work front and center.
- **Search and AI rarely send people there.** When someone searches "water heater repair Inverness," Google and AI tools mostly point to websites and listings, not Facebook posts.

Use social media to stay in touch with customers and show what you're up to. Then point those people to your website, where they can learn more and reach you.

> TRY THIS
>
> Log out of Facebook and look at your page as a stranger would. How much can you see? Can you find your services, service area and a way to request a quote in under 30 seconds?

CHAPTER 05

The "I'm already listed" trap

Many owners figure they're covered because they show up on Yelp, Angi, the Chamber directory, or a supplier's "find a dealer" page. Those listings help. But they aren't yours.

- **Lead-generation sites sell your leads.** Some platforms send the same customer to several competitors, or charge you for every inquiry.
- **Someone else's page is standing in for yours.** I've audited local businesses whose only "website" was a page on a supplier's or insurance carrier's site. The customer lands on a big company's page, not on the local business that earned the trust.
- **Mismatched details confuse Google and AI.** An old phone number on one site, a different spelling of your name on another, a former address on a third. Search engines and AI tools notice, and they get less sure about recommending you.

Listings are signposts. Your website is the destination they should point to.

> TRY THIS
>
> Search your business name plus your town and click the first five listings. Is your name, address and phone number exactly the same on each one?

CHAPTER 06

The cost of being invisible

It's easy to think of a website as an expense. It's more useful to think about what not having a good one costs.

Here's a simple way to figure it. Estimate how many people search for what you do in your area each month and don't find you — or find you, can't figure out how to reach you, and move on. Even a conservative guess adds up quickly:

- 4 missed jobs a month × $600 average job = $2,400 a month
- Over a year, that's $28,800 in work that went to someone else

Your numbers will be different. The worksheet in the appendix walks you through your own.

Now picture two roofers in the same town, equally skilled. One has a clear website with real photos, reviews and a "Request a Quote" button. The other has a Facebook page last updated in 2023. It's 9 PM on a Sunday and a storm just took off some shingles. Who gets the call?

> **TRY THIS**
>
> Fill in the lead-value worksheet in the appendix. Keep the number handy for Part 5.

PART 02

What customers judge in the first few seconds

Visitors decide in seconds whether you're legit, whether you do what they need, and how to reach you.

7	The 5-second test
8	Looking credible: design is a trust signal
9	Proof: reviews, licenses, years in business and real work
10	Mobile first: most of your visitors are on a phone
11	Make it easy to say yes
12	Speak the customer's language

CHAPTER 07

The 5-second test

Visitors make up their minds fast. In a well-known study from Carleton University, people formed a lasting opinion of a web page's visual appeal after seeing it for just 50 milliseconds — one twentieth of a second. That first impression colored everything they thought about the site afterward.

50 ms is how long it takes visitors to form a first impression of a web page.

LINDGAARD ET AL., 2006

So the top of your homepage, on a phone, has three jobs:

1. **What do you do?** "Roofing" or "Electrical, signs & trophies," in plain words.
2. **Where do you do it?** Your towns, not "the surrounding area."
3. **How do I reach you?** A big tap-to-call button and a "Get a Quote" button.

If a visitor has to scroll, squint or hunt for any of these, many will hit the back button and call the next business on the list.

> TRY THIS
>
> Hand your phone to a friend with your website open. Give them five seconds, then take it back. Ask: What do we do? Where? How would you contact us? If they hesitate on any of the three, your homepage needs work.

CHAPTER 08

Looking credible: design is a trust signal

Fair or not, people judge the quality of your work by the quality of your website. A dated or broken site makes visitors wonder whether you're still in business, or whether you'll cut corners on their job too.

What builds trust at a glance:

- **Real photos.** Your team, your trucks, your finished jobs. Stock photos of smiling models in hard hats are easy to spot and they say nothing about you.
- **Consistency.** Your logo, colors and tone should match your truck wraps, signs and business cards. It tells people you're established.
- **Clean and current.** No copyright from 2017, no broken images, no "Coming soon" pages, no typos in headings.
- **Your own email address.** info@yourbusiness.com looks more established than a Gmail address, and you probably already own the domain.

Good design isn't decoration. It's the difference between "these folks look solid" and "I'll keep looking."

> TRY THIS
>
> Put your homepage next to your top competitor's. Which business would you trust with a $10,000 job, based only on the screen?

CHAPTER 09

Proof: reviews, licenses, years in business and real work

Customers are trying to answer one question: "Can I trust these people with my home, my car, my health or my money?" Your website should answer it with proof, not adjectives.

47%

of consumers won’t use a business with fewer than 20 reviews.

BRIGHTLOCAL, 2026

Reviews are the strongest proof, and expectations are rising. In BrightLocal's 2026 survey, 47% of consumers said they won't use a business with fewer than 20 reviews, 74% only pay attention to reviews from the last three months, and 68% will only use a business rated four stars or higher. Most expect owners to respond to reviews, too.

Other proof that belongs on your site:

- License and insurance numbers (customers and AI tools both look for these)
- Years in business: "Serving Citrus County since 1987"
- Veteran-owned, family-owned, certifications, association memberships
- A gallery of real projects, labeled with the type of job and the town
- Short customer stories with a name and a photo, with permission

I've audited local businesses with excellent reputations — a 98th-percentile contractor score, a perfect rating, decades of history — that showed none of it on their website. That's leaving your best salesperson in the truck.

> **TRY THIS**
>
> List every piece of proof you have. Now check how many of them a visitor can see on your homepage without clicking.

CHAPTER 10

Mobile first: most of your visitors are on a phone

People search for local services on their phones: in the driveway, in a parking lot, standing in a flooded kitchen. Your site has to work there first.

53%

of mobile visits are abandoned when a page takes longer than 3 seconds to load.

GOOGLE

Speed matters most on mobile. Google's research found 53% of mobile visits are abandoned when a page takes longer than three seconds to load. That's half your visitors gone before they see anything.

A site that's truly built for phones has:

- A phone number you can tap to call and an address you can tap for directions
- Text you can read without pinching and zooming
- Buttons big enough for a thumb
- A "Call" or "Get a Quote" bar that stays on screen as you scroll
- Photos sized for phones, so the page loads fast on a weak signal

"Mobile-friendly template" doesn't guarantee any of this. A template can shrink to fit a phone and still be slow, clumsy and hard to act on.

> **TRY THIS**
>
> Turn off Wi-Fi, stand at the edge of your property, and load your website on cellular. Count the seconds. Then try to call yourself from the site with one tap.

CHAPTER 11

Make it easy to say yes

A visitor who's ready to hire you should never have to work to reach you. Every page should end with a clear next step.

- **A quote request form.** Many people browse at night or on the job and won't call. A short form — name, phone, town, what they need, an optional photo — captures leads while you sleep.
- **Answers before questions.** Service area, hours, how scheduling works, whether you offer free estimates, typical price ranges or "starting at" prices. Every question your site answers is one less reason to hesitate.
- **An FAQ that handles objections.** "Do you work on weekends?" "Are you licensed and insured?" "How soon can you come out?"
- **Confirmation.** When someone submits a form, they should see a thank-you message and get an email saying when you'll respond. And you should get notified immediately.

One local business I reviewed had a beautiful gallery and seven pages of content, but no form anywhere and a phone number you couldn't tap. Visitors who liked what they saw at 10 PM had nowhere to go.

> TRY THIS
>
> Pretend you're a customer and try to request a quote at midnight. How many steps does it take? Does anything confirm it went through?

CHAPTER 12

Speak the customer's language

Most small-business websites talk about the business. The good ones talk about the customer's problem.

Compare "We are a full-service HVAC contractor offering comprehensive solutions" with "AC out in August? We'll have someone at your door today." The second one sounds like a person, and it's what the customer is actually thinking.

A few principles:

- **One page per service.** Generators, panel upgrades, pool wiring and emergency calls each deserve their own page. It helps customers find what they need and helps Google and AI match you to specific searches.
- **Name your towns.** Customers and search engines both look for them.
- **Short sentences, plain words.** No jargon, no walls of text.
- **Make it readable for everyone.** Good color contrast, readable fonts, and descriptions on images (called alt text) help people with visual impairments, and search engines read them too.

> TRY THIS
>
> Read your homepage out loud. Does it sound like you talking to a customer, or like a brochure? Count how many times it says "we" versus "you."

PART 03

Why the DIY site costs more than it saves

Website builders are fine tools. Here’s why a site that looks finished can still be costing you work.

13 "I already have a website": signs yours is quietly losing you work

14 The template trap

15 The hidden cost of doing it yourself

16 WordPress: powerful, but it's a maintenance job

17 Speed, security and the stuff nobody sees

CHAPTER 13

"I already have a website": signs yours is quietly losing you work

If you built your own site, good for you. Most owners never get that far. But a website that exists isn't the same as a website that works. Here are the warning signs I see most often in local audits:

- There's no quote or contact form, only a phone number
- The phone number and email can't be tapped on a phone
- Your towns are never named, just "Citrus and surrounding counties"
- No reviews or testimonials appear anywhere
- Search your own business name and the website doesn't come up
- The homepage uses a stock photo even though you have dozens of real job photos
- Two pages share the same title, or a page's title doesn't match what's on it
- Photos have no captions, and some show up twice
- The footer still says "Made with [website builder]" with no copyright year
- Nobody has touched it in over a year

Every one of these comes from a real local business with a good reputation. None of them is a disaster on its own. Together, they make a site that looks finished but sends customers to competitors.

> TRY THIS
>
> Go through the list and count your checkmarks. Three or more and your website is likely costing you jobs.

CHAPTER 14

The template trap

Squarespace, Wix, GoDaddy and WordPress are good tools. I'm not here to knock them. The trouble is what they don't do.

A template handles layout: where the boxes go, how it shrinks on a phone. It doesn't decide:

- Which pages you need and what each one should say
- Where the call-to-action buttons belong and what they should say
- What words your customers type into Google, and how to use them in titles and headings
- How to tell search engines and AI tools, in their language, what your business is
- How to make photos load fast

Those decisions are the difference between a site that looks nice and a site that brings in work. They take a mix of marketing, writing, design and technical know-how — the parts a template leaves to you.

Common template mistakes I see: one long page with everything on it, big headings used just to make text bigger (which confuses Google about what the page is about), image filenames like "IMG_4725.jpg" showing up as link text, and contact information typed as plain text instead of tappable links.

> TRY THIS
>
> Look at your homepage and ask: if I were brand new to this business, what would the page tell me to do next? If the answer isn't obvious, the template is doing the layout but nobody is doing the strategy.

CHAPTER 15

The hidden cost of doing it yourself

The monthly fee for a website builder looks cheap. The real cost is everything around it.

- **Your time.** Every hour fighting a page builder is an hour you're not on a job, quoting, or with your family. If your time is worth $75 an hour, a 30-hour DIY project is a $2,250 website — and it still may not work.
- **The learning curve.** SEO, schema, image compression, accessibility, analytics, security. Each one is its own skill.
- **Fees that pile up.** Premium plans, add-on apps, form plugins, booking widgets, email services. Many owners pay for tools they never set up.
- **Lost logins and lost domains.** The nephew who built the site moved away. The developer stopped answering. Nobody knows the password to the domain account, and it's about to expire.
- **No backups.** One bad update or one hack and the site is gone.

DIY can be the right call for a brand-new business with no budget. For an established business, it's often the most expensive "free" option there is.

> TRY THIS
>
> Write down where your domain is registered, who has the login, when it renews, and where your site is backed up. If you can't answer all four, that's your first project.

CHAPTER 16

WordPress: powerful, but it's a maintenance job

WordPress runs a huge share of the web, and it's a fine choice in the right hands. It's also the platform I see in the worst shape.

A typical WordPress site depends on a theme plus a dozen or more plugins, each made by a different company. They all need regular updates. Skip the updates and you risk getting hacked. Run them carelessly and one update can break the whole site.

Page-builder add-ons make WordPress easy to edit, but they often make pages heavy and slow, which hurts you on phones and in Google.

None of this means you should avoid WordPress. It means someone needs to own it: keeping it updated, backed up, secure and fast every month. If that someone is you, put it on your calendar. If it's nobody, it's a problem waiting to happen.

> TRY THIS
>
> Log in to your WordPress dashboard. How many updates are waiting? When was your last backup?

CHAPTER 17

Speed, security and the stuff nobody sees

The most important parts of a website are the ones visitors never notice — until something goes wrong.

- **Speed.** Remember: half of mobile visitors leave if a page takes more than three seconds. Speed comes from properly sized images, lean code, good hosting and fewer unnecessary add-ons. Google measures this and factors it into rankings.
- **Security.** HTTPS (the padlock in the address bar), software updates, strong logins, and spam protection on forms. A hacked site can get flagged by Google with a warning that scares off every visitor.
- **Backups.** Automatic, regular, and stored somewhere other than the site itself.
- **Uptime.** Someone should know within minutes if your site goes down — and it shouldn't be a customer telling you.
- **Forms that actually deliver.** It's surprisingly common for contact forms to send messages straight to spam, or to an email address nobody checks anymore.

> TRY THIS
>
> Run your site through Google's free PageSpeed Insights tool (pagespeed.web.dev). Then submit your own contact form and see if — and where — the message arrives.

PART 04

What a website that works actually does

The craft behind a site that gets found, earns trust, and turns visitors into calls.

18 Local SEO in plain English

19 Getting into the AI answer

20 Built to convert: turning visitors into calls

21 Measuring what matters

22 A website is never "done"

CHAPTER 18

Local SEO in plain English

SEO (search engine optimization) just means making it easy for Google to understand what you do and where, so it shows you to the right people. For a local business, it comes down to a handful of things done carefully and consistently:

1. **A page for each service.** "Panel upgrades," "Generator installation," "Emergency electrical service." Each one can rank for its own searches.
2. **Your towns, named.** On service pages, in a service-area section, and in your Business Profile. "Citrus and surrounding counties" ranks for nothing. "Panel upgrades in Homosassa" can.
3. **Page titles and descriptions.** The blue headline and short summary people see in Google. Each page needs its own, written for a human to click.
4. **Clear headings.** One main heading per page that says what the page is about, then sub-headings that organize it.
5. **Matching business details everywhere.** Same name, address and phone number on your site, Business Profile and every directory.
6. **Reviews, and replies to them.** Steady new reviews tell Google you're active and trusted.
7. **Links between your own pages.** Your generator page links to your panel upgrade page, your gallery links to the services shown.
8. **Fresh content.** New photos, new projects, seasonal updates. A site that never changes looks abandoned.

There's no trick here and no secret. It's a long list of small things, each done right, and it adds up.

> TRY THIS
>
> Search "[your main service] [your town]" in a private browser window. Where do you show up — in the map listings, in the regular results, or not at all?

CHAPTER 19

Getting into the AI answer

In Chapter 3 we saw that AI tools recommend only a small slice of local businesses. Here's how a website helps you become one of them.

Speak the machine's language. Websites can include hidden labels called structured data (or schema markup) that tell search engines and AI tools exactly what something is: "This is a licensed electrician. Here's the address, phone, hours, service area, services, and average rating." Visitors never see it. Machines read it first. Most template sites have little or none.

Write answers worth quoting. AI tools pull from pages that answer real questions clearly. "How much does a panel upgrade cost in Citrus County?" "Do I need a permit for a generator?" A good FAQ and service pages written in plain, specific language give AI something to work with.

State the facts that build confidence. Who you are, where you work, how long you've been in business, your license number, who you're certified by. AI tools are cautious about recommending a business they can't verify.

Be consistent everywhere. AI cross-checks your details across your website, Google, Apple Maps, Bing, Yelp, the BBB and industry directories. SOCi found the business information these AI tools showed was only about 68% accurate. Mismatches make them less sure about you — or worse, they tell a customer the wrong phone number.

Keep the reviews coming. The businesses ChatGPT recommended averaged 4.3 stars, according to SOCi's research.

Notice that none of this is a new trick. AI rewards the same things good local SEO always has — clear, accurate, detailed, trustworthy information — just more strictly. The experts surveyed for Whitespark's 2026 Local Search Ranking Factors added AI visibility as its own category for the first time, and website quality ranks high on that list.

> TRY THIS
>
> Ask ChatGPT, "What do you know about [your business name] in [your town]?" Is the answer right? Is anything missing or wrong?

CHAPTER 20

Built to convert: turning visitors into calls

Getting found is only half the job. The other half is turning a visitor into a phone call, a form submission or a booking. Web people call this conversion.

A site built to convert:

- Puts a clear next step on every page, not just the contact page
- Uses buttons that say what happens: "Get My Free Estimate" beats "Submit"
- Keeps forms short. Ask only for what you need to call them back
- Lets trades customers upload a photo of the problem
- Shows proof (reviews, license, guarantees) right next to the button
- Confirms every request on screen and by email, and notifies you right away
- Makes it just as easy to call as to fill out a form

Small changes here can make a big difference. A site that turns 3 out of 100 visitors into leads instead of 1 out of 100 triples your results without a single extra visitor.

> TRY THIS
>
> Count the number of places on your homepage where a visitor can tap to call or request a quote. If it's fewer than three, add more.

CHAPTER 21

Measuring what matters

"How many hits does my site get?" is the wrong question. Visits don't pay the bills. Leads do.

What's worth tracking each month:

- Phone calls from the website and from your Google Business Profile
- Quote requests and form submissions
- Requests for directions
- Which pages people land on, and which services they look at most
- Which searches bring people to your site

Google's free tools (Search Console, Analytics and the Business Profile dashboard) can show most of this. The trick is setting them up correctly and turning the numbers into a one-page report you'll actually read.

> **TRY THIS**
>
> Ask yourself how many leads your website brought in last month. If you don't know, that's the first thing to fix.

CHAPTER 22

A website is never "done"

A website isn't a brochure you print once. It's more like a storefront: it needs to be kept clean, stocked and in good repair.

Ongoing care looks like:

- **Security and software updates** so the site stays safe and fast
- **Backups and monitoring** so problems are caught and fixed quickly
- **New photos and projects** so the site shows your current work
- **New reviews** added as they come in
- **Seasonal updates.** Hurricane prep in June, AC tune-ups in spring, holiday hours in December
- **Small improvements** based on what the monthly numbers show

This is why I offer care plans alongside every website. A site that's maintained keeps earning. A site that's neglected slowly turns back into the problem you paid to fix.

> TRY THIS
>
> Set a recurring reminder for the first of every month: check your site on your phone, test your form, and add one new photo or project.

SIDEBAR

Everything behind one page

Here's what goes into a single, well-built service page — say, "Generator Installation in Citrus County."

1. Research what customers search for and ask about
2. Plan the page and where it fits in the site
3. Write the copy in the customer's language
4. Write the FAQ answers
5. Choose, crop and compress real photos
6. Write image descriptions (alt text)
7. Design the layout for phone and desktop
8. Place the calls to action and the quote form
9. Add proof: reviews, license, guarantees
10. Write the page title and search description
11. Structure the headings
12. Add structured data (schema) for the service and FAQ
13. Link it to related pages
14. Test the speed on a slow phone connection
15. Check accessibility: contrast, fonts, labels
16. Test the form, and the confirmation emails
17. Set up call and form tracking
18. Submit it to Google
19. Link to it from the Business Profile, if it fits
20. Review results after 30 days and adjust

That's one page. A typical local business site has 6 to 15 of them. Each step is simple to explain. Doing all of them well, together, is the job.

PART 05

Doing it right, and who should do it

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CHAPTER 23

DIY, agency, freelancer or "cheap web guy": an honest comparison

There's more than one right way to get a website. Here's how the options compare for a typical local service business.

Option	Typical cost	Your time	What you usually get	Watch out for
Do it yourself	$200–$600/yr in fees	20–60+ hours, plus upkeep	A site that looks okay; strategy, SEO and AI setup are up to you	Hours you can't bill; nobody maintaining it
"Cheap web guy"	$300–$1,000	Low at first	A template with your logo	Disappearing, owning your domain, no SEO
Big agency	$8,000–$25,000+	Medium	Polished work and a full team	Price, long contracts, account managers instead of the builder
Local specialist	$2,000–$4,000+, plus a care plan	Low	A custom site built for local search and leads, with ongoing support	Make sure they show local work and you own everything

When DIY genuinely makes sense: you're just starting out, money is tight, and you enjoy learning this stuff. Start simple and plan to upgrade when the business can support it.

When it doesn't: you're established, your time is worth more on the job, and you're losing work to competitors who show up better online.

CHAPTER 24

Questions to ask before you hire anyone

Whoever you hire, ask these first:

1. **Do I own my domain, my content and my photos?** The answer should be yes, in writing.
2. **Where is the site hosted, and can I move it if we part ways?**
3. **Is local SEO included?** Titles, service pages, town names, Business Profile alignment.
4. **Is structured data (schema) included, and will you help with AI visibility?**
5. **Who writes the words?** Good copy matters as much as design.
6. **How will I get leads?** Forms, tracking, notifications.
7. **What happens after launch?** Updates, backups, security, changes.
8. **Can I see sites you've built for businesses like mine, and talk to those owners?**

Red flags:

- "Guaranteed #1 on Google." Nobody can promise that honestly.
- You rent the site and lose it if you stop paying.
- They register your domain in their name.
- Long contracts you can't get out of.
- No examples of local work.

CHAPTER 25

What it costs, and what you get

A professionally built website for a local service business is an investment, and it should pay for itself. Remember the worksheet from Chapter 6: if a better website brings in even one or two extra jobs a month, it usually covers its cost within the first year.

Here's how I price it. These are the same packages published on my website.

Starter

From $2,000

A sharp, fast site for a business that needs to look legitimate and get the phone ringing.

- Up to 5 pages, custom design
- Contact form with spam protection
- Basic local SEO and schema
- Mobile-first, tap-to-call

MOST POPULAR

Business

From $4,000

For established businesses that serve several towns and want real lead generation.

- Up to 12 pages
- Service-area pages for your towns
- A page for each main service
- Quote forms, booking, reviews
- Call and form tracking

Custom

Quoted per project

When you need more than a marketing site.

- Ecommerce and online ordering
- Customer and staff portals
- Web apps and automation
- Integrations with your software

$0 down option: spread the build cost over 24 monthly payments with nothing upfront, bundled with a care plan. You still own the site.

Every site pairs with a care plan, because a website that's maintained keeps earning:

Essential

$99/mo

- Hosting, SSL and backups
- Uptime monitoring
- Security updates
- Monthly report
- 1 edit per month

Growth

$199/mo

- Everything in Essential
- Google Business Profile upkeep
- Quarterly speed and SEO check
- Seasonal promos
- Up to 3 edits per month

Partner

$349/mo

- Everything in Growth
- New pages and landing pages
- Monthly strategy call
- Lead-form tuning
- Up to 3 hours per month

Care plans are month-to-month after launch (except during a $0-down payment term). No long-term lock-in.

CHAPTER 26

How I work



I'm Chris Putnam, and I run Putnam Technology from right here in Citrus County.

I taught myself to program as a kid in the late 1980s, earned my degree in Computer Information Systems in 2005, and have spent the 20 years since building software for businesses in finance, insurance, healthcare, automotive, and warehousing and shipping. I've also built marketing and ecommerce sites for web development shops. In other words, I've seen how websites are built at every level, from big companies to small shops — and I bring that experience to local businesses at a local-business price.

Here's how working with me goes:

1. **Free website check-up.** I review your current site (or your online presence if you don't have one), your Google profile and how you show up in AI tools, and walk you through what I find in plain English.
2. **A concept you can see.** For many businesses, I'll mock up what a new homepage could look like, so you're not buying blind.
3. **Build.** I handle the design, writing, photos, local SEO, schema, forms and tracking. You review and approve.
4. **Launch.** I connect everything: domain, Business Profile, tracking, and confirmation emails.
5. **Care.** I keep it fast, safe and current, and send you a simple monthly report.

You own everything. You deal with me directly, not an account manager. And I'm local, so we can meet in person.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Get your free website check-up

I'll review your site (or your online presence if you don't have one), your Google profile and how you show up in AI tools, then send a plain-English report on speed, SEO and mobile. No obligation.

chris@putnamtechnology.com
putnamtechnology.com

Scan to request yours

APPENDIX A

25-point website self-audit

FOUND

- [ ] Your site comes up when you search your business name
- [ ] You appear for "[main service] [your town]"
- [ ] Your Google Business Profile exists, links to your site, and has current hours
- [ ] Name, address and phone match on your site, Google, Apple Maps, Bing, Yelp and BBB
- [ ] ChatGPT gives correct information when asked about your business

FIRST IMPRESSION

- [ ] A stranger can tell what you do, where, and how to reach you in 5 seconds
- [ ] The homepage uses real photos, not stock
- [ ] Nothing is broken, outdated or "coming soon"
- [ ] You use an email address on your own domain
- [ ] The copyright year is current

MOBILE

- [ ] Pages load in under 3 seconds on cellular
- [ ] The phone number is tap-to-call
- [ ] Text is readable without zooming
- [ ] A call or quote button stays on screen

PROOF

- [ ] Reviews or testimonials are on the site
- [ ] License and insurance details are shown
- [ ] Years in business or founding year is shown
- [ ] The gallery shows real projects with job type and town

LEADS

- [ ] There's a quote or contact form
- [ ] You tested the form this month and it arrived
- [ ] Every page ends with a clear next step
- [ ] You know how many leads the site brought in last month

BEHIND THE SCENES

- [ ] Each service has its own page
- [ ] Your towns are named on the site
- [ ] The site is backed up and updated, and you know who has the logins

Scoring: 22–25 strong · 15–21 losing some work · under 15 losing a lot.

APPENDIX B

What's a lead worth? Worksheet

Line	Your number
Average value of one job ($)	
Share of quotes that become jobs (%)	
Value of one lead = job value × close rate ($)	
Extra leads per month a better website could bring	
Monthly value = lead value × extra leads ($)	
Yearly value = monthly × 12 ($)	

Example: $600 job × 50% close rate = $300 per lead. Four extra leads a month = $1,200 a month, or $14,400 a year.

APPENDIX C

Plain-English glossary

Domain: your web address, like yourbusiness.com. Make sure it's registered in your name.

Hosting: the computer that stores your site and serves it to visitors.

SSL / HTTPS: the padlock in the browser. It keeps visitor information private and is expected by Google.

SEO: search engine optimization. Helping Google understand and show your site.

Local SEO: SEO focused on showing up for customers in your area, including Maps.

Google Business Profile: your free listing in Google Search and Maps.

AEO / GEO: answer engine and generative engine optimization. Helping AI tools like ChatGPT understand and recommend you.

Schema / structured data: hidden labels that tell search engines and AI exactly what your business is and does.

CTA (call to action): a button or link that asks the visitor to do something, like "Get a Free Estimate."

Conversion: a visitor taking that action.

Alt text: a written description of an image, read by screen readers and search engines.

Zero-click search: a search where the person gets an answer on the results page and never visits a website.

NOTES

Sources

Every statistic in this guide comes from the research below. Figures were current as of October 2026.

Statistic used	Chapters	Source
97% read reviews; AI for local recommendations 6% → 45%; 54% visit the website after good reviews; ~40% of local businesses have a website; 35% have a Business Profile; review thresholds (20 reviews, 3 months, 4+ stars)	1, 2, 3, 9	BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026 (1,002 US adults, Feb 2026)
ChatGPT recommended 1.2% of ~350,000 locations vs ~36% in Google's local 3-pack; recommended businesses averaged 4.3 stars	3, 19	SOCi 2026 Local Visibility Index, via Search Engine Land and Localogy
AI business info ~68% accurate on ChatGPT/Perplexity	19	SOCi 2026, via Gracker
44% used AI for local search in past month (3,848 consumers)	3	Yext 2026 Consumer Search Behaviors
71% of US adults use Facebook	4	Pew Research Center, Americans' Social Media Use 2025
First impressions in 50 milliseconds	7	Lindgaard et al. 2006, via Nature
53% of mobile visits abandoned after 3 seconds	10, 17	Google, The Need for Mobile Speed (2016), via Marketing Dive
AI search visibility added as a ranking category	19	Whitespark 2026 Local Search Ranking Factors

Is your website costing you calls?

Get a free, plain-English check-up of your website's speed, Google visibility, mobile experience and how AI tools see your business. No obligation, no jargon.

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