SMALL BUSINESS Websites & Search

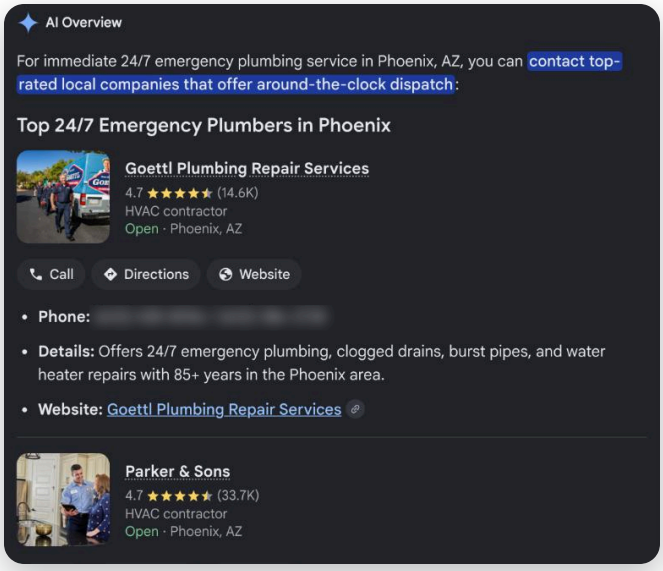
WR022 · TODAY'S HEADLINE

Google's AI answer now sits on top of local searches, above the map or in place of it.

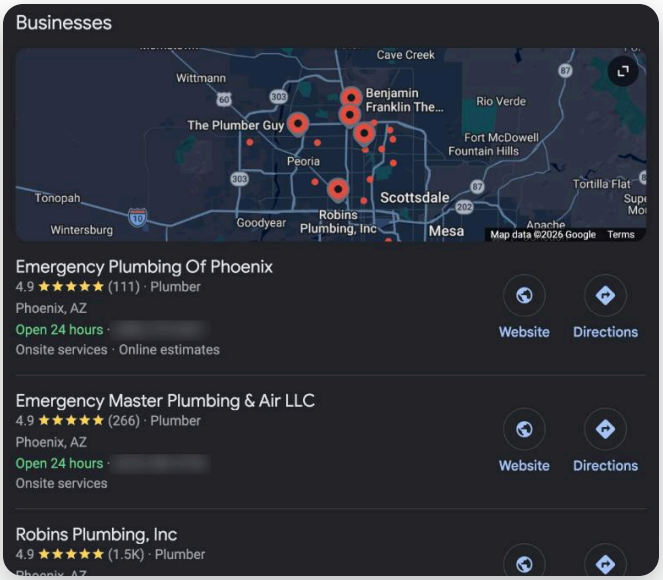
An electrician was in Google's top three on the map. Right above the map, Google's AI answer recommended four other electricians. Not that one.

That's what Chris Shirlow, who does local search work for businesses, saw for one of his clients. So he ran **480 searches by hand**: 10 kinds of local businesses, from plumbers and dentists to roofers and lawyers, in 12 U.S. cities big and small, each searched twice from September to November. [1]

1 · TOP OF THE PAGE: GOOGLE'S AI ANSWER



2 · FURTHER DOWN: THE MAP



I ran one of his searches myself on Nov 18: "need an emergency plumber Phoenix AZ." The AI answer at the top named four plumbers. The map came further down, and its first two businesses weren't among them. One search, not a study. Phones blurred.

38 → 66 of 100 searches showed the AI answer in his first 8 cities, about two weeks apart

60 → 99 in his last 4 cities, about four weeks apart. Then 79 of 80 had no separate map. [1]

Being in the top three on the map didn't mean the AI named you.

On the 145 searches where the AI answer and the map were both on the page, the AI answer left out at least one of the map's three businesses 114 times. About 1 in 5 times, it named none of them. [1]



How many of the map's 3 businesses the AI answer also named, out of 145 searches [1]

And it didn't just pick the biggest names. 373 of the 1,023 businesses it named didn't have a website on Google's first page. On 46 of 144 searches, it named a business with fewer than 50 reviews that wasn't on the map, while the map showed one with 200 or more. [1]

WHAT ISN'T SETTLED

This is one person's study. His raw data isn't published, and Semrush, where it ran, sells search tracking. I found no word from Google on it. Joy Hawkins, who runs a local search company, reported a new AI version of the map results on mobile that drops reviews, address and hours (Nov 10) [2], and wrote on Nov 17 that she's "really starting to think" it's a bug. [3] His cards showed ratings and a call button. So the look is still moving.

What I'd do doesn't change much, you know. Keep your Google Business Profile right: the cards showed the same names, ratings and addresses as the profiles. Get on the lists customers really read: after business websites, the AI answer cited Yelp most, then industry directories. And answer the questions people ask, in their words, on your own site. [1]

He also says build a page for every city you serve. Careful there. Google's spam rules name "pages targeted at specific regions or cities that funnel users to one page" as doorway abuse. [4] A city page needs something true about that city, or skip it.

Search for what you do, the way a customer would say it. Then look at who Google names first.

WatchLocal score: 79 out of 100. This is how I rate this story: how solid the proof is (45), how much it touches getting found (30), and how much it changes what an owner should do (25).

Sources

[1] Chris Shirlow, Semrush blog, "AI Overviews are taking over the map pack. Here's what I found," Nov 17, 2026 semrush.com

[2] Barry Schwartz, Search Engine Roundtable, "Google AI Overview Local Pack Dropping Action Buttons, Photos & Reviews," Nov 10, 2026 seroundtable.com

[3] Joy Hawkins on X, Nov 17, 2026 x.com/JoyanneHawkins

[4] Google Search Central, "Spam policies for Google web search," doorway abuse, read Nov 18, 2026 developers.google.com

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No client is named here, ever.
My read of the evidence, not a promise of any result.