

AP^{EX} TRADE

EDITION 2026 · FREE PLAYBOOK

THE 2026 TRADIE GROWTH BLUEPRINT

How South East Queensland trade businesses are winning online, dominating local search, and getting recommended by AI.

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A NOTE BEFORE YOU START READING

FROM THE DESK OF JAMES SUMMERILL

If you're running a trade business in 2026 and the phone isn't ringing the way it used to, you are not alone — and it is not your fault.

The way customers find tradies has changed completely in the last 24 months. The old playbook (a Facebook page, a few business-card flyers, a website your nephew built in 2017) doesn't move the needle anymore. Google now answers questions with AI before anyone clicks a link. ChatGPT is recommending specific local businesses by name. Customers compare you against your competitors in 90 seconds based on reviews, photos, and how fast your website loads on their phone while they're sitting in their ute.

This guide is the playbook we wish someone had handed us five years ago. It's a flat-out account of what actually works for tradies in South East Queensland in 2026 — written by an agency that works on this every day.

Read it cover to cover and you'll know more about modern trade marketing than 90% of the people selling marketing services. Apply even half of it and you'll outpace your local competition within 12 months.

Let's go.

— James

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	WHY "WORD OF MOUTH ONLY" HAS QUIETLY BECOME A RISK	p.4
02	YOUR GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE IS YOUR #1 ASSET	p.7
03	YOUR WEBSITE NEEDS TO CONVERT, NOT JUST EXIST	p.12
04	AI SEARCH IS CHANGING EVERYTHING	p.17
05	SEO VS GOOGLE ADS: USE BOTH	p.21
06	REVIEWS ARE YOUR MODERN REPUTATION	p.25
07	WHERE SOCIAL MEDIA ACTUALLY FITS	p.29
08	THE APEX 6-LAYER MARKETING STACK	p.32
+	BONUS · YOUR 12-WEEK IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP	p.35
+	BONUS · THE FULL APEX STACK IN ONE PAGE	p.37

01

SECTION 01

WHY "WORD OF MOUTH ONLY" HAS QUIETLY BECOME A RISK

01

SECTION 01

WHY "WORD OF MOUTH ONLY" HAS QUIETLY BECOME A RISK

For decades the standard tradie business model was simple: do good work, your mates tell their mates, the phone rings. That model isn't dead — but it's quietly become a single-supplier dependency on a market that's actively shrinking.

THREE THINGS CHANGED AT ONCE

- 1. The pool of repeat customers got older.** Boomers — the generation that drove referral economies — are aging out of major home renovation and trade spend. Gen X is mid-renovation but already shifting their buying behaviour online. Millennials and Gen Z, who now make up the majority of new homeowners across Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast, almost never ask a mate first. They Google, they read reviews, they shortlist three businesses, then they choose. If you're not in those three, the conversation never happens.
- 2. Your competition got more aggressive.** Five years ago you had two or three local rivals. Today the top result for "plumber near me" in your suburb is competing with national franchises, lead-aggregator services pretending to be local businesses, and well-funded marketing-led tradies who treat their digital presence like their van — a tool they invest in.
- 3. Customers stopped trusting one source.** The modern customer journey doesn't end with "Bob said you were good." It ends with "Bob said you were good, then I Googled you, then I checked your reviews, then I looked at your photos, then I read your About page, then I rang you." If any of those steps go wrong, Bob's recommendation is wasted.

COMMON MISTAKE

Relying 100% on referrals because "that's how we've always got work."

THE APEX MOVE

Layer a strong digital presence underneath your referral engine. Word of mouth still converts at 50-80% — keep it. Just stop depending on it as your only channel.

THE MODERN TRADIE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Even when someone is referred to you, here's what actually happens before they ring. Every gap below is a place you lose customers you've already been recommended to:

1

Mate mentions your name

"Apex Plumbing did our hot water — they were great."

2

They Google your business name

If they can't find you, the referral evaporates.

3

They scan your Google profile

Stars, recent reviews, photos, response rate.

4

They click through to your website

They want to confirm you're real and professional.

5

They decide in under 60 seconds

Call you, save you, or ring the next business.

THE BLUNT VERSION

If 100% of your leads come from referrals, you don't have a business — you have a job that depends on other people remembering you.

02

SECTION 02

**YOUR GOOGLE BUSINESS
PROFILE IS YOUR #1 ASSET**

02

SECTION 02

YOUR GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE IS YOUR #1 ASSET

If you do nothing else from this guide, do this section. Your Google Business Profile is the single highest-leverage marketing asset a trade business can own in 2026.

Here's why it beats your website, your socials, and almost everything else:

- It appears **above** organic search results for local intent
- It surfaces in **Google Maps** — where 76% of "near me" searchers visit a business within 24 hours
- It feeds directly into **Google AI Overviews** when people ask AI-style questions
- It costs nothing to claim
- Most of your competitors are doing it badly

THE MAP PACK: WHERE LOCAL MONEY IS DECIDED

The "Map Pack" is the box of three businesses with a map that appears at the top of local search results. Owning a Map Pack slot is worth more than ranking #1 organically below it. The three Map Pack businesses get 40-70% of all clicks for high-intent local searches.

Google chooses which three businesses to show based on **relevance, distance, and prominence**. You can't change distance. You can absolutely move the dial on relevance and prominence.

THE 25-POINT GBP OPTIMISATION CHECKLIST

Run your profile against this list. Tick every item. If you can't tick all 25, that's your improvement list for the next 30 days.

THE BASICS

- Primary category is your exact trade (e.g. "Plumber" not "Contractor")
- Every applicable secondary category is added
- Business name matches your legal/website name exactly
- Phone number is identical to your website
- Website URL points to your homepage (no tracking junk)
- Service area covers every suburb you actually service
- Hours are accurate, including public holidays
- "From the business" description is filled out (750 chars max)

SERVICES & PRODUCTS

- Every individual service is listed as its own "Service"
- Each service has its own 200+ character description
- Prices added where appropriate
- "Products" section used for any productised offerings

PHOTOS & CONTENT

- Logo uploaded (square, high-res)
- Cover photo uploaded (real work, not stock)
- 10+ photos of completed jobs
- Team / van photo with branding visible
- Geo-tagged photos where possible
- A Google Post published in the last 7 days

REVIEWS & ENGAGEMENT

- More than 50 reviews
- Star rating above 4.5
- Replied to at least 80% of reviews
- Reviews in the last 30 days

ADVANCED

- Q&A section pre-populated with your top 5 customer questions
- Booking link enabled (if relevant)
- "Attributes" added (women-owned, family-run, etc.)
- Messaging enabled with a 24-hr response time

THE "FROM THE BUSINESS" DESCRIPTION FORMULA

This is the single most-skipped field on GBP — and one of the strongest relevance signals. Use this template (swap the bracketed bits for your business):

[BUSINESS NAME] is a [TRADE] servicing [PRIMARY SUBURB] and the broader [REGION] area since [YEAR]. We specialise in [SERVICE 1], [SERVICE 2], and [SERVICE 3] for [RESIDENTIAL/COMMERCIAL/BOTH] customers.

Our team is [LICENSED/CERTIFIED/INSURED] and [HOW YOU'RE DIFFERENT – e.g. "available for emergency callouts 24/7" or "specialises in heritage homes"].

We service [SUBURB 1], [SUBURB 2], [SUBURB 3], [SUBURB 4], and surrounding [REGION] areas. Call [PHONE] or book online at [WEBSITE] for a free quote.

Why this works: it surfaces your trade, location, services, years in business, and licensing — every signal Google and AI engines weigh for "is this a real local business?" Plus it naturally repeats keywords without being spammy.

THE 2026 GBP RHYTHM — WHAT TO DO EVERY WEEK

Most tradies set up GBP once and never touch it. That's a slow death. Google rewards activity. Here's the cadence we run for every client:

FREQUENCY	TASK	TIME
DAILY	Reply to any new reviews within 24hr	2 min
WEEKLY	Upload 2-4 photos from recent jobs	5 min
WEEKLY	Publish one Google Post (offer / job photo / tip)	10 min
MONTHLY	Check Insights — calls, directions, clicks trend	10 min
MONTHLY	Send review-request texts to last month's customers	15 min
QUARTERLY	Refresh photos, audit categories, update description	30 min

THE METRIC THAT MATTERS

Profile views is the wrong number. Track Direction Requests, Calls, Website Clicks, and Bookings. If those aren't trending up month-on-month, your profile needs work.

03

SECTION 03

**YOUR WEBSITE NEEDS TO
CONVERT, NOT JUST EXIST**

03

SECTION 03

YOUR WEBSITE NEEDS TO CONVERT, NOT JUST EXIST

A website built in 2015-2020 was designed to exist. A website built for 2026 needs to convert. These are two completely different things.

The average trade website converts at 1-3% of visitors. A properly built converting trade website converts at 8-15%. **On the same traffic, that's 4-10× more leads from work you've already paid for.**

THE FOUR-PILLAR CONVERSION STACK

- 1. Speed.** Sites that take more than 3 seconds to load lose more than half their visitors before the page even appears. Test yours at PageSpeed Insights — if mobile score is under 80, you're bleeding leads. Common killers: oversized hero images, unused plugins, bloated themes, lazy hosting.
- 2. Mobile.** More than 70% of trade-service searches happen on a phone. If your site looks "fine" on desktop but the call button is hard to tap, the form fields don't autofill, or the menu doesn't scroll — you've lost them. Click-to-call buttons should be sticky on mobile. Always.
- 3. Trust signals above the fold.** When the page loads, the visitor needs to see — in the first screen, without scrolling — at least four of: your reviews/star rating, service area, phone number, a recent photo of your work, years in business, and your guarantee.
- 4. A clear primary action.** Every page should have **one** primary action — repeated three to five times down the page. Two-action homepages convert 30-50% lower than single-action homepages.

HOMEPAGE CTA EXAMPLES THAT ACTUALLY CONVERT

The exact CTA wording matters more than most tradies realise. Generic CTAs ("Contact Us", "Learn More") convert 2-3x worse than specific ones. Swap yours for one of these:

✗

Contact Us

Generic. No urgency. No value.

✓

Get Your Free On-Site Quote

Free + on-site = clear value, low risk.

✗

Learn More

Vague. Promises nothing.

✓

Book My Free 15-Min Inspection

Specific time, specific outcome, no commitment.

✗

Submit

Form-language. Sounds like work for them.

✓

Send Me My Quote →

First-person. Reward-focused. Arrow signals action.

✗

Call Now

Pushy. No reason given.

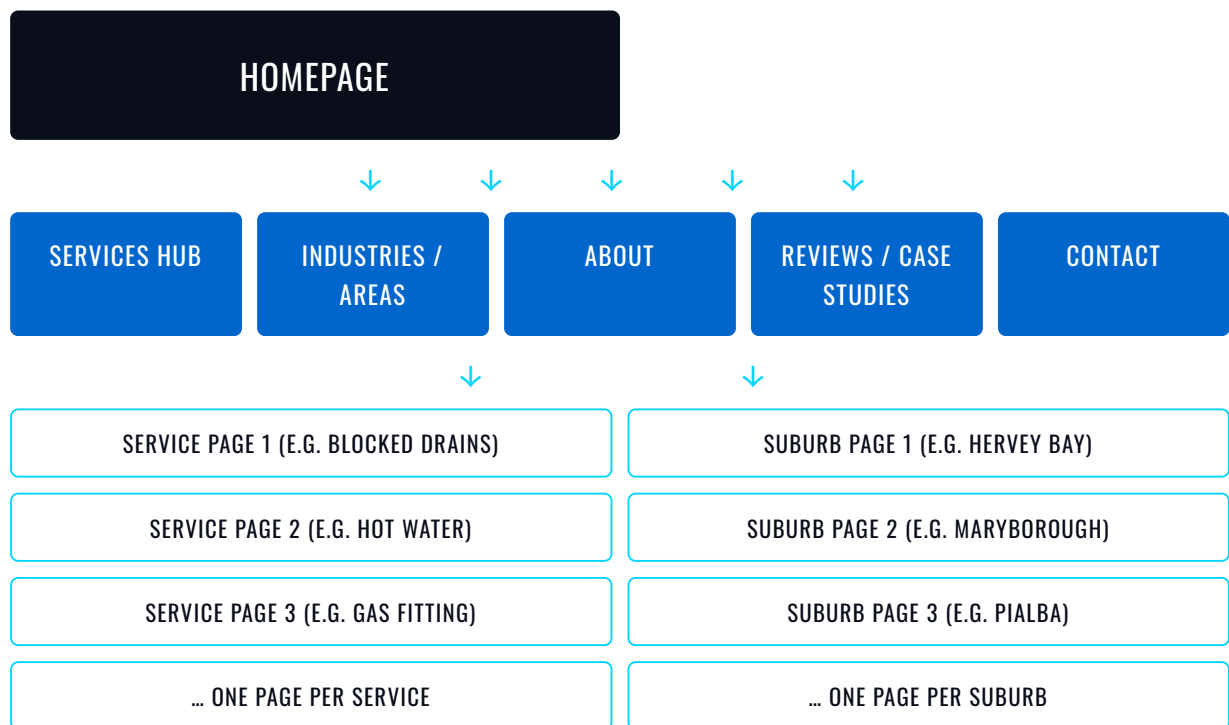
✓

Call Now — We Answer in Under 30 Sec

Specific promise = trust signal.

THE IDEAL TRADIE WEBSITE STRUCTURE

This is the page architecture that ranks and converts. Every box is a real page that exists for a real reason — for users, for Google, and for AI engines.



Why the matrix matters: a plumber with 8 services × 6 suburbs = 48 highly-specific pages, each ranking for queries like "blocked drain plumber Hervey Bay". That's how you dominate. Most tradies have one "Services" page and wonder why nothing ranks.

WHAT'S KILLING YOUR CONVERSION RIGHT NOW

In our audits we see the same five mistakes:

- ✗ Hero image is generic stock photo of someone else's work
- ✗ No reviews or star rating visible on the homepage
- ✗ Phone number is plain text — not a clickable `tel:` link

× Contact form has 8+ fields (name, phone, service is enough)

× No service-specific pages (just one "Services" list)

Fix those five and conversion typically jumps 2-3× without changing a single line of traffic strategy.

A NOTE ON FACEBOOK PAGES

Facebook pages are not websites. Not indexed properly, not owned by you, don't show up in Map Packs, and don't appear in AI Overviews. Use Facebook to support a real website. Don't use it instead of one.

04

SECTION 04

AI SEARCH IS CHANGING EVERYTHING

04

SECTION 04

AI SEARCH IS CHANGING EVERYTHING

If you only learn one new thing from this guide, learn this section. A growing percentage of high-intent searches now go through AI-powered answer engines — not the classic blue-link results page.

The big four:

- **Google AI Overviews** — the AI-generated summary that now appears above search results for most service queries
- **ChatGPT** — now searching the live web and recommending specific local businesses by name
- **Perplexity** — pure answer engine, citing sources, growing fast among professionals
- **Google Gemini** — Google's own AI, with deeper GBP integration than anything else

When someone asks "who is the best plumber in Brisbane?" in any of these tools, an answer is produced. **The business in that answer wins.** The businesses not in that answer don't get the chance to compete.

WHY THIS IS BIGGER THAN SEO

For 20 years, ranking #1 on Google was the prize. In an AI-Overview world, even ranking #1 might not save you. The user might get their answer from the AI summary and never click a link.

The new question isn't "how do I rank #1 on Google?" It's **"how do I get recommended by the AI?"**

HOW AI ENGINES ACTUALLY CHOOSE WHO TO RECOMMEND

1. Entity authority. Does the AI recognise your business as a distinct, real-world entity? Determined by structured data (schema markup), consistent NAP details across the web, your Google Knowledge Panel, and citations from authoritative sources.

2. Topical depth. Does your website have substantive content on the topics relevant to your service? AI engines reward depth, not just keyword presence. A plumber's site with one page on "blocked drains" loses to one with eight pages covering different aspects of blocked drains.

3. Reviews and external validation. AI engines pull heavily from review platforms to validate businesses. High volume + recent + positive = winning.

4. Mention frequency. How often is your business mentioned across the web — local news, blogs, directories, supplier sites, professional bodies? This is the new "backlinks" — only it counts mentions even without a link.

MICRO WIN · CHECKLIST

THE AI VISIBILITY CHECKLIST

Run your business through these 18 items. Each one independently moves the needle on whether ChatGPT / Gemini / Perplexity / Google AI will mention you when someone asks about your trade in your area.

ENTITY FOUNDATION

- LocalBusiness schema markup on every page
- Service schema for each individual service
- FAQ schema on service / location pages
- Organization + Person schema (you, the owner)
- Consistent NAP (Name, Address, Phone) across web
- ABN published on the site
- Real founder/owner name + photo on About page
- Licensing & certification numbers shown
- Knowledge Panel claimed (if you have one)

CONTENT SIGNALS

- 1,500+ word service pages with FAQ blocks
- Suburb-level location pages (one per service area)
- A blog with answer-style articles (not "5 tips" lists)
- Internal linking between related content
- `/llms.txt` file at the root of your domain

EXTERNAL VALIDATION

- 100+ Google reviews, 4.5+ star average
- Mentions on local news / blogs / directories
- Listed in industry-specific directories
- Social profiles with consistent branding

SCHEMA TYPES EVERY TRADIE SITE SHOULD HAVE

SCHEMA TYPE	WHERE IT GOES	WHAT IT TELLS AI
<code>LocalBusiness</code>	Every page (in sitewide JSON-LD)	You're a real local business
<code>Organization</code>	Every page	Your entity identity (logo, NAP, social)
<code>Person</code>	About page	Real founder, real expertise
<code>Service</code>	Each service page	What you specifically do
<code>FAQPage</code>	Service + location pages	Question-answer pairs AI can quote
<code>BreadcrumbList</code>	Every page	Site hierarchy
<code>Review</code> / <code>AggregateRating</code>	Homepage + service pages	Validated reputation
<code>Article</code>	Every blog post	Educational content, with author

THE WINDOW IS CLOSING

The businesses establishing themselves as the recommended entity in their trade and suburb right now — in 2026 — are going to be very hard to dislodge in 2027 and beyond. AI engines build conviction. We expect the AI window to be tighter than the early Google SEO window was — maybe 18-36 months — but the prize is the same.

05

SECTION 05

SEO VS GOOGLE ADS: USE BOTH

05

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SEO VS GOOGLE ADS: USE BOTH

Most tradies see SEO and Google Ads as alternatives. They are not. They're two different tools for two different jobs — and the businesses that win run them together.

	GOOGLE ADS	SEO
SPEED TO FIRST LEAD	24-48 hours	3-9 months
COST BEHAVIOUR	Stop paying, traffic stops	Compounds over time
BEST FOR	Urgent / high-intent / emergency	Sustainable long-term flow
RISK	Burns cash if site doesn't convert	Slow ROI in months 1-6
CONTROL	Switch on / off instantly	Slow to change once ranking
COST PER LEAD (SEQ TRADIES)	\$50-\$200 typical	\$10-\$40 once mature

WHEN GOOGLE ADS MAKES SENSE

- **You need leads now.** No other channel matches Ads for speed.
- **You're testing a market or service.** Faster than organic to validate demand.
- **You're targeting high-value, low-volume queries.** Emergency plumber. Storm damage roofing. Same-day services.
- **You're in a competitive area with strong incumbent SEO.** Ads buy visibility while the organic builds.

SEO MISTAKES TRADIES MAKE (AND WHAT TO DO INSTEAD)

THE MISTAKE	WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
Targeting one broad keyword like "plumber"	Target "blocked drain plumber Hervey Bay" — specific, local, high-intent
One "Services" page listing everything	One dedicated page per service, 1,500+ words each
No location pages	One page per suburb you service, with localised content
Generic stock photos	Real geo-tagged photos of your work
Identical content across location pages	Unique content referencing local landmarks, suburbs, postcodes
Ignoring schema markup	LocalBusiness + Service + FAQ schema on every relevant page
Buying backlinks from cheap services	Earn mentions from local news, supplier sites, directories
"SEO" is one-and-done	Publish answer-style content monthly, refresh quarterly
Targeting only Google	Optimise for ChatGPT / Gemini / Perplexity (GEO)
Slow website	Sub-3-sec mobile load, ideally under 2 seconds

THE RIGHT BLEND

For most established trade businesses, a healthy mix looks like:

- **60-70% of marketing budget into long-term assets** — website, SEO, GBP, content
- **30-40% into Google Ads** — focused on high-intent commercial keywords with strong tracking

When the SEO matures (typically 6-12 months in), shift more budget to scaling. But never let Google Ads spend fund poor organic infrastructure — that's a treadmill you can't get off.

COMMON MISTAKE

Pouring 100% of marketing budget into Google Ads because "it works." Then panicking when leads dry up the day you pause the campaign.

THE APEX MOVE

Use Ads to fund the short term. Use SEO + GBP + reviews to build the long term. Every dollar of Ads should be paying for an asset that compounds even after the ads stop.

TWO METRICS THAT MATTER MORE THAN EVERYTHING ELSE

Cost Per Lead (CPL) — target \$50-\$200 depending on trade and ticket size. **Lead-to-Job Conversion** — if below 30%, fix sales before you scale traffic.

06

SECTION 06

REVIEWS ARE YOUR MODERN REPUTATION

06

SECTION 06

REVIEWS ARE YOUR MODERN REPUTATION

There is one number on the internet that determines whether 80% of new customers will ring you, or skip you and ring the next business: your Google review profile.

Specifically, three things:

- Your **star rating** (4.7+ to win, 4.5+ to compete, below 4.3 you're losing leads daily)
- Your **review count** (100+ feels established; under 20 feels new and risky)
- Your **review recency** (reviews older than 12 months suggest the business may have changed)

THE SYSTEM THAT GETS YOU 4-12 REVIEWS PER MONTH, EVERY MONTH

Most tradies "ask for reviews when they remember." That produces 1-3 reviews per quarter. To get 4-12 per month, you need a system. Three parts:

- 1. Automated request, at the right moment.** 24-72 hours after job completion — long enough to be happy with the result, short enough that it's fresh. Don't wait three weeks.
- 2. The lowest-friction path possible.** A direct link to your Google review form that opens with the review box pre-loaded. Not "search for us on Google and leave a review." Most won't.
- 3. A personal-feeling prompt.** Generic "please leave us a review" texts get 3-5% response. A personal text that feels like it's from you gets 25-40%.

THE REVIEW REQUEST SMS THAT GETS 30%+ RESPONSE

Hi [FIRST NAME], [YOUR NAME] here from [BUSINESS NAME]. Really enjoyed sorting [SPECIFIC JOB – e.g. "that hot water system"] for you yesterday – hope it's all running well!

If you've got 60 seconds, would you mind dropping us a quick Google review? It genuinely helps a small local business like ours.

Here's the direct link: [DIRECT GOOGLE REVIEW LINK]

Either way, cheers for the job – appreciate you choosing us.

– [YOUR NAME]

Why this works: uses their name, your name, references the specific job (proves it's not bulk-blasted), uses "60 seconds" (concrete time cost), explains why it matters ("helps a small local business"), thanks them either way (no pressure). Direct link removes friction.

How to get your direct review link: in your Google Business Profile, find "Get more reviews" → copy the short link. It opens straight to a star-and-textbox prompt.

THREE REVIEW REPLY TEMPLATES (STEAL THESE)

Replying to every review — good, average, or bad — signals to Google your profile is active, and signals to future customers that you care. Use these as starters.

★★★★★ Five-Star Reply

Cheers [FIRST NAME] — really appreciate you taking the time to leave us a review. Was great working on [JOB TYPE] for you. Any time you or anyone you know needs a hand, give us a yell. — [YOUR NAME]

★★★☆☆ Three-Star Reply

Hi [FIRST NAME], thanks for the honest feedback. We pride ourselves on [SPECIFIC THING], so it bothers me to read that [WHAT WENT WRONG]. I'd love to chat directly to understand what we could've done better — I'll call you on [PHONE] this week. — [YOUR NAME], owner of [BUSINESS NAME]

★☆☆☆☆ One-Star Reply

Hi [FIRST NAME], I'm genuinely sorry the experience didn't match what we aim for. I've taken your feedback to heart and I'd like to make it right. Please contact me directly on [PHONE] or [EMAIL] so we can sort this. We've been serving [REGION] tradies for [X] years on the back of doing right by people, and I want to make sure we do that for you too. — [YOUR NAME], owner

The non-obvious bit: future customers read your reply to bad reviews more carefully than your good reviews. A calm, accountable, professional reply to a one-star turns it from a liability into a trust signal.

DON'T BUY REVIEWS

Just don't. Google's review-spam detection in 2026 is genuinely good. Fake reviews get flagged and removed in batches — often taking your real ones with them — and a busted profile is hard to recover. Worse: your competitors can and do report them.

07

SECTION 07

WHERE SOCIAL MEDIA ACTUALLY FITS

WHERE SOCIAL MEDIA ACTUALLY FITS

Here's the part most marketing agencies won't tell you: for a trade business, social media is not your main lead source — and it shouldn't be.

If you spent the last two years pouring effort into reels and Facebook posts hoping the phone would ring, and it didn't, that's not because you're doing social wrong. It's because social isn't built to do what you wanted it to do.

WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA IS GENUINELY GOOD AT FOR TRADIES

- **Trust amplification.** Someone referred to you Googles you, finds your website, then checks your Instagram. If your Insta shows real recent work, real vans, real team — they're 3× more likely to call.
- **Reach to existing audiences.** Great for staying top-of-mind with past customers and your local community.
- **Recruitment.** Showing what it's like to work for you. The most underrated use of social in trades.
- **Local awareness.** Especially in regional SEQ (Fraser Coast, Toowoomba, Gympie) where Facebook community groups still genuinely matter.

WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA IS BAD AT FOR TRADIES

- **Direct cold lead generation.** A scroller is not a buyer. Almost nobody books a plumber from a reel.
- **Replacing search-based marketing.** When the hot water dies at 9pm, nobody opens TikTok. They open Google.
- **Driving SEO.** Social signals are not direct ranking signals.

THE 70 / 20 / 10 POST MIX FOR TRADIES

If you only have 30 minutes a week for social, use this split. It produces social that actually does its job (trust + community) without trying to be something it isn't (a lead generator).

Real work

70%

Before/after, time-lapses, job-site moments, finished projects, team in action. Show that you're working and showing up.

Educational

20%

"Why your kitchen drain blocks every winter." "What to ask before signing a building contract." Tradie-explains-something content.

Personal / Community

10%

Team birthdays, supporting local events, your dog on the work ute. Humanises the brand. Builds local loyalty.

COMMON MISTAKE

Spending three hours editing a reel chasing virality, then wondering why none of those views called.

THE APEX MOVE

Spend 30 minutes / week on social. Make it authentic. Put the saved hours into GBP, reviews, and your website — the channels that actually generate leads.

IMPORTANT

Never let social media metrics dictate your marketing strategy. Likes do not pay bills. Calls and quote requests do.



08

SECTION 08

THE APEX 6-LAYER MARKETING STACK



THE APEX 6-LAYER MARKETING STACK

Everything in the previous seven sections needs to fit together. This is the framework we use with every client at Apex Trade Marketing — the order of operations that produces consistent growth.

Six layers, built in order, each multiplying the layer above it.

L1

GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE (FOUNDATION)

Everything starts here. Before you spend a dollar on ads, before you write a blog post, before you touch your website — your GBP needs to be best-in-class. Highest-ROI layer in your entire marketing stack. Do not skip it.

L2

CONVERTING WEBSITE

A converting website sits beneath everything else — the engine room. Every channel sends traffic somewhere. If "somewhere" leaks, nothing else matters. Build this second.

L3

REVIEWS SYSTEM

Once GBP and website are dialed, plug in a review-generation system. Leads produce reviews, which produce more leads — compound interest, but for marketing.

L4

GOOGLE ADS (OPTIONAL BUT FAST)

If you need faster lead flow than organic will give you in months 1-6, add Google Ads in parallel with the next two layers. Ads pay for themselves quickly when the first three layers are solid. They burn cash if those layers are weak.

L5

SEO + GEO CONTENT

The long-term play. Service pages, location pages, blog content, schema markup, AI-friendly content structure. This is what builds organic dominance, entity authority, and AI-engine recommendations. Slow to start, exponential once it goes.

L6

SOCIAL MEDIA

Built on top, supporting everything else. Not the main lead engine — the trust amplifier and community channel. Most effective when there's real work to show, which only happens once the layers below are producing leads.

WHY THE ORDER MATTERS

Most tradies do this in reverse. They start with social because it's free and visible, then maybe a website, then maybe think about Google. By the time they get to GBP and reviews — the highest-value layers — they've burnt years and dollars.

Do it in the right order and every layer makes the layer above more effective. Do it in the wrong order and every layer above is fighting an unfixed problem below.

YOUR 12-WEEK IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

If you tried to do everything in this guide at once, you'd burn out by week two. Here's the order we recommend, broken into 12 weeks, by priority and dependency.

P1

PHASE 1 · WEEKS 1-4 · FOUNDATION

- WEEK 1** Audit current GBP against the 25-point checklist. Fix the basics: categories, hours, service area, phone, "From the business" description. Upload 10 photos.
- WEEK 2** List every individual service on GBP. Pre-populate Q&A with your top 5 customer questions. Publish your first Google Post.
- WEEK 3** Audit your website. Run PageSpeed Insights. Check mobile experience. List the 5 conversion mistakes — fix what you can in-house.
- WEEK 4** Set up the review-request system. Send the template SMS to every customer from the last 90 days. Aim for first batch of 5-10 reviews.

P2

PHASE 2 · WEEKS 5-8 · BUILD THE ENGINE

- WEEKS 5-6** Rebuild homepage with above-the-fold trust signals + one clear CTA. Add a click-to-call button. Trim the contact form.
- WEEK 7** Write your first 2 service pages (1,500 words each). Add LocalBusiness + Service + FAQ schema.
- WEEK 8** Write your first 2 suburb pages. Internal-link to relevant service pages. Add to sitemap. Submit to Google Search Console.

P3

PHASE 3 · WEEKS 9-12 · SCALE

- WEEK 9** If lead flow needs a boost, launch tightly-scoped Google Ads on 3-5 high-intent keywords. Set up proper conversion tracking.
- WEEK 10** Continue building out service / suburb page matrix. Two more pages this week. Publish your first blog post (answer-style, 1,500+ words).
- WEEK 11** Set up /llms.txt. Add Person + Organization schema. Audit external mentions — submit to 5 industry directories.
- WEEK 12** Set the ongoing rhythm: weekly GBP posts + photos, monthly content, quarterly audit. Track CPL and lead-to-job monthly.

REALITY CHECK

If reading this list made you tired, you're not alone. This is what proper digital marketing actually looks like — and why most tradies' results are mediocre. Done well, it adds 30-50% to a small trade business's annual revenue. Done poorly, or skipped, costs the same.

THE FULL APEX STACK — EVERYTHING IN ONE PAGE

Every moving part of a modern tradie marketing system, mapped against the 6 layers. This is what we manage day-to-day for our clients. Use it as a self-audit — anything you can't tick is a gap.

L6	SOCIAL MEDIA Instagram · Facebook · TikTok · Real-work posts · Educational reels · Community engagement · Recruitment content · Cross-promotion with local businesses · Hashtag strategy · Story highlights
L5	SEO + GEO CONTENT Service pages · Suburb pages · Blog content · Internal linking · Schema markup · llms.txt · Knowledge Panel · External citations · Directory listings · Topic clusters · Answer-style content · Content refreshes
L4	GOOGLE ADS Keyword research · Negative keyword lists · Ad copy variants · Landing pages · Conversion tracking · Call tracking · Bid strategies · Geo-targeting · Day-parting · Quality Score optimisation · A/B testing
L3	REVIEWS SYSTEM Automated request triggers · Direct review links · SMS templates · Review monitoring · Reply templates · 5/3/1-star response strategy · Review-to-website embedding · Reputation alerts · Negative review escalation
L2	CONVERTING WEBSITE Sub-3-sec load · Mobile-first design · Above-fold trust signals · Click-to-call · Trimmed contact forms · Service-specific pages · Suburb pages · Photo gallery · Reviews on homepage · CTA-per-page · Live chat (optional)
L1	GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE All categories · Full service list · Photos weekly · Posts weekly · Q&A pre-populated · Booking link · Messaging on · Insights tracked · Description optimised · Reviews replied · Hours accurate · Service area mapped
FOUNDATION · YOUR LICENSED TRADE BUSINESS	

APEX TRADE

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

TAKE THE WIN — NOW ACT ON IT

If this guide felt like a lot, take the win — you now know more than 90% of trade business owners about modern marketing. But knowledge only matters if you act on it.

This week: pull up your Google Business Profile. Look at it on your phone the way a customer would. Count how many of these are missing or weak:

- All services listed individually
- Photos uploaded in the last 30 days
- A Google Post in the last 14 days
- Star rating above 4.5
- More than 50 reviews
- Replies on at least 80% of reviews
- A complete "From the business" description with relevant keywords

Every gap is leaking leads. Every gap is fixable.

Next week: pick the biggest gap and close it. Just one. Don't try to do everything. That's how this works — compound improvements on the highest-leverage asset you own.

WANT A FREE AUDIT OF YOUR CURRENT MARKETING?

An honest, no-obligation look at where you actually stand — across GBP, website, reviews, AI visibility. We'll show you what's working, what's leaking, and what's worth fixing first.

[APEXTRADEMARKETING.COM.AU/CONTACT](https://apextrademarketing.com.au/contact)

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