fort MYERS
ISLANDS, BEACHES & NEIGHBORHOODS

The GEO Playbook

A GUIDE FOR FORT MYERS AREA BUSINESSES

How to get your business found in AI search. What to do, in what order, and how to tell if it's working.

Prepared with MMGY



WHY THIS MATTERS

Travelers stopped browsing. They ask.

People now ask ChatGPT, Google and Gemini where to eat, stay and play. They don't scroll through ten links. They take the answer. If your business isn't in that answer, you aren't in the running.

40%

of travelers already plan trips with AI

2 in 3

Google searches now end without a single click

1 in 2

local businesses are described wrong by AI today

The good news: AI rewards the same things good local marketing always has. Accurate details, plenty of recent reviews, a website that answers real questions, and a few trusted locals vouching for you. Most of your competitors haven't done this yet.

HOW AI FINDS A BUSINESS

It reads what the internet says about you.

AI looks for places that agree with each other, then repeats what it trusts. These are the six places it looks. The more of them that describe you the same way, the more confident it is recommending you.

Google Business Profile

Your hours, category, photos and reviews. The first place every AI looks.

Your website

The single most quoted source. Menu, rooms, prices, what makes you different.

Reviews

Google, Yelp, Tripadvisor. How many, how recent, and the words people use.

Bing and Apple Maps

ChatGPT runs on Bing. Siri runs on Apple. Often forgotten, easy to fix.

Local press and best-of lists

Someone else saying you're worth it. News-Press, Gulfshore Life, Tripadvisor awards.

VisitFortMyers.com

The official destination site, with every local business in one trusted place. When AI hunts for the "official source" on this area, this is what it finds.

What you can stop worrying about: page speed and technical SEO scores. They don't move AI recommendations. Reviews and content do.



FOUR THINGS TO KNOW

How the AI picks who to recommend.

It runs ten searches for one question

Best-of lists, your official site, this year's facts, reviews. There are many ways in, so you don't have to win them all.

It asks for you by name

"Official site" is the phrase it searches most. For this area, that means VisitFortMyers.com and your listing on it. Being official gets you found. Matching facts everywhere gets you believed.

It checks the date

It adds "latest" and "2026" to its own searches. A page with no date can't prove it's current, so it loses quietly.

It checks your neighbors too

Almost half its searches name a competitor. Ask about you and it looks at the three places next door as well.

Ask it for "best restaurants in Fort Myers" and it praises everyone. Ask "is [your business] worth it?" and it goes looking for complaints. The page that answers those complaints is the one almost nobody writes. More on that in Step 4.

STEP 1

Find out what's already out there.

You can't fix what you haven't found. Two things to do before you change anything.

Write down your one true version

Your name as it appears on the sign. One address, one phone number, one website. Hours for every day, including holidays and season changes. What you are in two sentences. Ten good photos. Every listing you touch from here on gets copied from this list, letter for letter.

Ask the AI two questions about you

"Why should I eat at / stay at [your business]?"

"Why shouldn't I eat at / stay at [your business]?"

The first tells you what you're known for. The second tells you what puts people off before they ever call. Write both lists down. Then ask the same two questions about your two closest competitors.



STEP 1, CONTINUED

Let the AI do the audit for you.

Copy the prompt on the right into ChatGPT, Claude or Perplexity with web search turned on. Fill in the brackets. In a few minutes it will find things you didn't know were wrong.

Try it in two different tools. Save the results. Run it again in three months.

⚠ What it usually finds

- An old phone number or address still live somewhere
- Hours that don't match between Google and your website
- A duplicate or unclaimed listing
- You're missing from VisitFortMyers.com or the Chamber
- A competitor in the answer because they have more reviews

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I run a business in the Fort Myers, Florida area and want to know exactly how my business appears online today.

Business name: [NAME] · Address: [STREET, CITY, STATE ZIP] · Phone: [PHONE] · Website: [URL] · Type of business: [e.g. seafood restaurant, food truck, boutique hotel]

Searching the live web for each step:

1. Find every listing for this business. Check at least Google Maps, Apple Maps, Bing Places, Yelp, Tripadvisor, Facebook, Instagram, VisitFortMyers.com, the local Chamber of Commerce, and any booking or ordering sites for my type of business.

2. For each listing, show the name, address, phone, website and hours exactly as they appear.

3. Compare every listing to the details above. List every difference, however small. Tell me which listings are missing or unclaimed.

4. Now act as a traveler. Ask three questions a visitor might ask about a business like mine. Did I come up? If not, who did, and what do they have that I don't?

5. Summarize what reviews and articles say we're good at and what people complain about.

Show the listings as a table marked Correct / Wrong / Missing, then a short list of what to fix first.
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STEP 2

Google doesn't know anything about you.

When Google emails to ask "are you open on Easter?", that is the whole system admitting it. Every blank on your Google Business Profile is a question the AI answers by guessing, or by asking your competitor. This is the most valuable hour you will spend.

Pick the exact category

Google has over 4,000. "Cuban restaurant" beats "Restaurant". Add every secondary one that fits.

Add 20 photos, then keep adding

Outside, inside, your best dishes or rooms, your team. A few new ones every month.

Answer the Q&A yourself

Add the five questions you get asked most, with your answers, before a stranger does.

Tick every attribute

Outdoor seating, pet friendly, Wi-Fi, pool, kids menu, takeout, reservations, accessible. Each one is an answer.

Menu or rooms as text

Dining: type the menu in, don't upload a PDF. Lodging: list room types and link to direct booking.

Post twice a month

A special, an event, a new dish, seasonal hours. It tells the AI you are open and current.

22% → 94%

How much more likely a hotel is to be recommended by AI once its profile is filled in completely instead of half done.

STEP 2, CONTINUED

Make everywhere else match.

AI looks for agreement. One listing with an old phone number makes it doubt all the others. Copy your one true version everywhere, then make your website the easiest place to get the facts.

Claim and match these listings

- **Bing Places.** ChatGPT runs on it. Import your Google profile in a few clicks
- **Apple Business Connect.** Apple Maps and Siri
- **Yelp and Tripadvisor.** Fix the details, add photos
- **Facebook and Instagram.** Check the About section
- **VisitFortMyers.com.** The official destination site and the listing AI trusts most about this area. Make yours complete, with your best photos
- **The Chamber** and any booking or ordering sites you use
- Remove duplicates. Report closed locations

Your website needs these

- Name, address, phone and hours at the bottom of every page
- An About page: who you are, how long you've been here, what you're known for
- Dining: the full menu as text with prices. Food trucks: this week's schedule
- Lodging: a page per room type with rates and distances to the beach, downtown and the airport
- An FAQ page with your ten most-asked questions
- A visible "Updated November 2026" on anything that changes
- Ask your web person to allow AI crawlers and add business schema. A 20-minute job

STEP 3

Build your review engine.

Reviews are the strongest signal there is. Businesses AI recommends have around 130 Google reviews. Businesses it can't find have about 10. How many and how recent matter more than the star rating.

Read your last 50 first

Note the three things people praise and the three complaints that keep coming back. Fix the complaints. Put the praise on your website.

Ask in person, at the happy moment

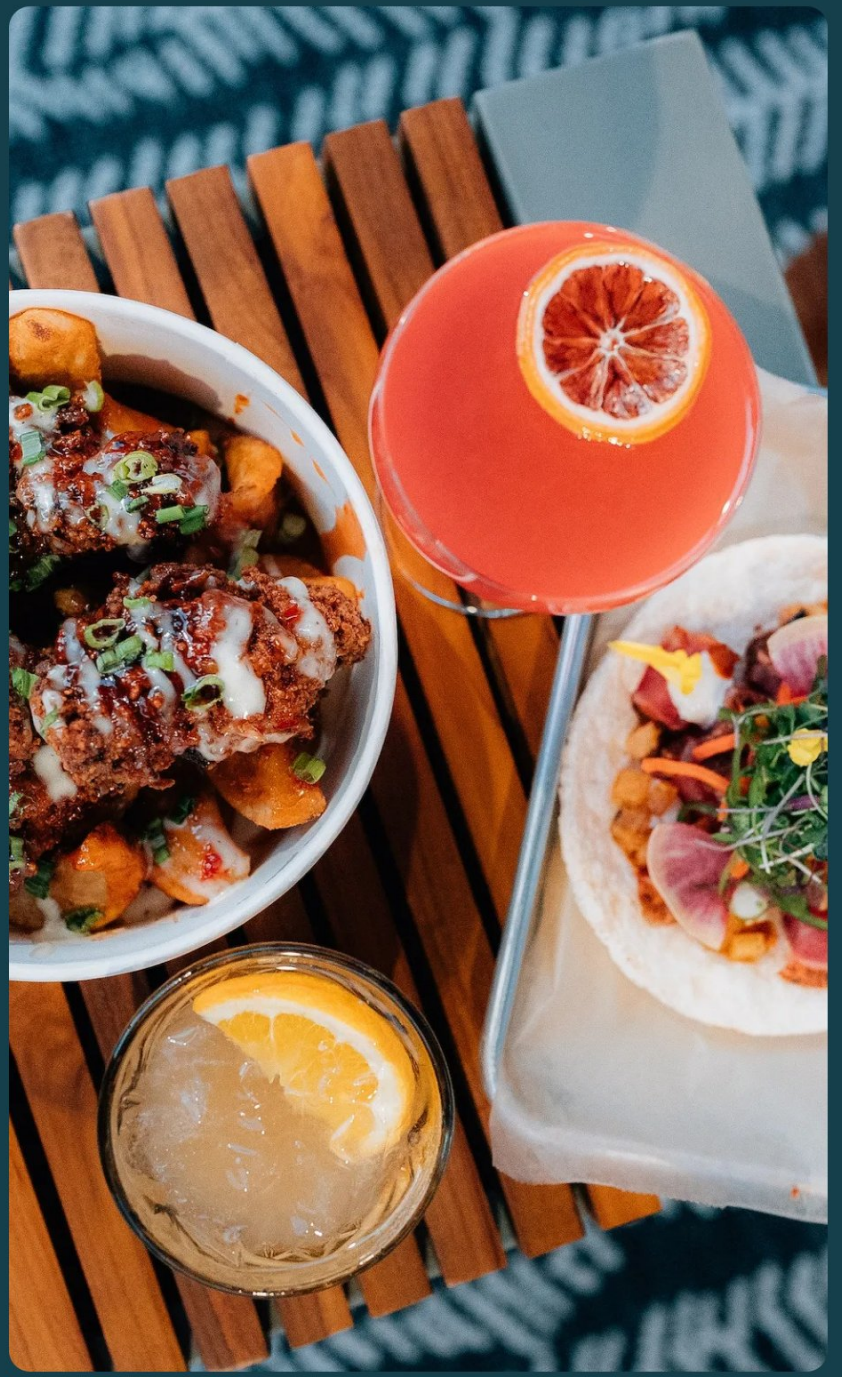
"How was everything?" first. Then ask the delighted ones for a Google review. A QR code on the receipt or key card helps. Never pay for reviews.

Nudge the words

"Great grouper sandwich, easy parking, dog-friendly patio" teaches the AI three things. "Great place" teaches it nothing. Ask people to say what they had.

Reply to every review

Within two days. Thank them, repeat the specific thing they liked, add one fact. For complaints: acknowledge, say what changed, offer to talk. Keep it short.



STEP 4

Answer the questions people actually ask.

If you don't answer questions about your business, a review site or a competitor will. You don't need a blog. You need a few pages on your website that each answer one real question, fully, in plain words.

Start with what you hear every day

"Is there parking?" "Can we bring the dog?" "How far is Sanibel?" "Where's the truck this week?" Each one is a page or an FAQ entry. Question as the heading, answer in the first line.

Answer the worry, not just the fact

"Is there parking?" really means "Will I circle for 20 minutes with hungry kids?" So: "Free lot out back, 30 spaces. Saturdays it fills by 7, so use the public lot on Estero, a two-minute walk."

Write the page nobody writes

Take your "why shouldn't I" list from Step 1. What it costs and why. How busy it gets and when to come instead. What's being renovated and when it reopens. The AI will answer these about you anyway. Better it quotes you than a one-star review.

Pick a lane you can own

For "best restaurants in Fort Myers" you're one of hundreds. For "best grouper sandwich on Fort Myers Beach" there might be three of you. Pick two or three lanes and say them on your homepage.

"Ten things to do in Fort Myers" the AI can write itself, so it has no reason to quote yours. Your prices, your chef's story and which table has the best sunset view are things only you know. One honest, specific page beats a hundred roundups.



STEP 5

Get other people talking about you.

AI trusts a newspaper, a best-of list and above all the official destination site, VisitFortMyers.com, far more than your own homepage. You don't need Michelin. You need to be in the local conversation.

Enter the local awards

News-Press Best of Southwest Florida, Gulfshore Life Best of the Gulfshore, Tripadvisor Travelers' Choice. Being nominated counts too.

Send a little news

New menu, new chef, anniversary, charity night. Five sentences and two photos to the News-Press, WINK, NBC2 or Gulfshore Life. Say yes to every interview.

Start with Visit Fort Myers

Its itineraries, guides and stories are what AI quotes first about this area. Ask the team how to be featured. Then email the "best of" writers and join your Chamber and neighborhood guides.

Stay social and partner up

Keep Instagram going with your location tagged. Swap mentions with neighbors: the inn's "where to eat nearby" page, the restaurant's "where to stay" page.

IS IT WORKING?

Your website stats won't tell you. Ask.

When someone reads about you in ChatGPT and then types your name into a browser, it shows up as "direct" traffic. When they call or walk in, it shows up nowhere. Your website visits can go down while your business goes up.

Ask "How did you hear about us?"

At the till, at check-in, in your booking form. Add "ChatGPT or another AI" as an option. Count it monthly. It is the only real count you'll get.

Keep five test questions

Questions you want to be the answer to. "Best casual seafood on Fort Myers Beach with outdoor seating." Every three months, ask each one in ChatGPT, Google and Gemini. Note if you're named, and who else is.

Fix it at the source

Answers change a little each time, so don't panic over one miss. If the AI gets something wrong about you, it got it from somewhere: an old listing, an old article, a review. Correct it there.

When	Test questions where you were named (of 15)	Google reviews (total)	New reviews since last time	Press or list mentions
Today				
In 3 months				
In 6 months				

YOUR CHECKLIST, PART 1

Do these once, and keep them true.

#	Do this	Then
1	Write down your one true version: name, address, phone, hours, category, description, photos	Update it whenever something changes
2	Run the AI audit prompt in two assistants and save the results	Run it again every three months
3	Ask the AI “Why should I?” and “Why shouldn’t I?” about your business	Every three months
4	Fill in every field on your Google Business Profile: exact category, all attributes, 20+ photos, menu or rooms as text	Add photos and a post monthly
5	Match Bing, Apple, Yelp, Tripadvisor and Facebook to Google, word for word	Check every three months
6	Make your VisitFortMyers.com listing complete and current with your best photos. It’s the official source AI trusts most	Check twice a year
7	Put hours, address and phone at the bottom of every web page; add a text menu or room pages, an FAQ, and a visible “last updated”	Update monthly
8	Ask your web person to allow AI crawlers and add business schema	Once
9	Say what you’re best at, in one sentence, on your homepage and About page	Once

YOUR CHECKLIST, PART 2

Make these habits.

#	Do this	How often
10	Ask happy guests for a Google review, in person, at the happy moment	Every day
11	Reply to every review with a specific, friendly, factual reply	Every week
12	Write one web page answering a real customer question, starting with your “why shouldn’t I” list	Every month
13	Post to Instagram with your location tagged	Every week
14	Enter local awards and email the “best of” writers	Twice a year
15	Send one piece of news to local media	Every three months
16	Ask “How did you hear about us?” with an AI option, and count the answers	Always
17	Ask your five test questions in three AI tools and fill in the scorecard	Every three months

START THIS WEEK

Craft your own truth

Being accurate everywhere gets you believed.

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