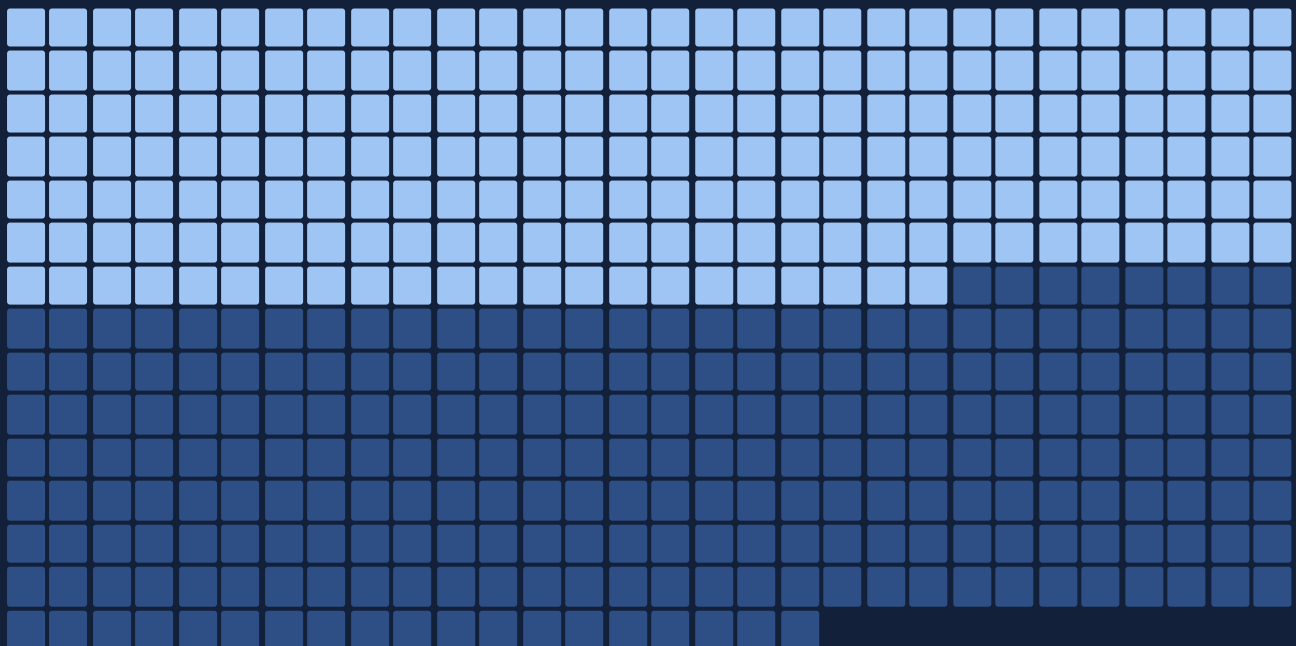


What's really wrong with small business websites

Findings from 439 live website reviews in 33 countries, October 2025 to October 2026



■ Needed significant work (202) ■ Mostly solid, with fixes (237) Each square is one website

Key findings

Six things the data says

9

The median website had nine problems worth fixing. We logged 4,043 issues across 439 sites. Only 11 sites (2.5%) were rated strong with little to change.

70%

Seven in ten lacked proper service pages: services crammed onto one page, missing, or thin. It was the fix most often called top priority, on 192 sites.

73%

Sites in money, health and legal niches lacked trust signals more often (73% against 56%), and the gap was flagged as high priority more than twice as often.

75%

Three in four sites had missing or broken schema markup (304 of the 405 sites where it was checked), the most common problem in the study.

7%

Mobile is solved. Structure is not. Only 7% had mobile layout problems, while 63% had title tag and meta description issues and 61% had heading problems.

68%

Health and medical sites were the most likely to need significant work, against 39% of local service businesses and 39% of marketing agencies.

1. About this research

What we reviewed, why, and where

Every review in this report is a screen recording of Nico Gorrone going through a real, live website and saying what he would fix. The sites came from two places:

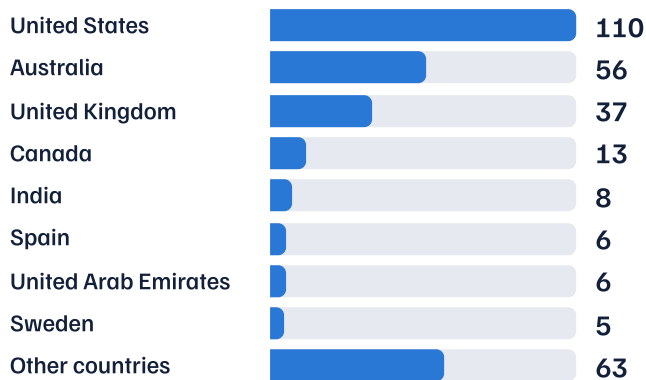
- **133** came from **Find the Fix**, a weekly public series where any business owner can submit a site for a review.
- **306** were **member site reviews**: owners, freelancers and agencies inside the AI Ranking community who asked for feedback on their own or a client's website.

Owners asked for a review because their site was not ranking, not converting, newly launched or about to be rebuilt. That makes this a sample of sites whose owners care about search, not a random sample of the web. We think that makes the findings more useful, not less: these are the mistakes that survive even when someone is paying attention.

Each review starts with the first impression, then works through metadata, headings, speed, schema, content, service and location pages, trust signals and local search, using public tools such as GTmetrix, Google PageSpeed Insights and Google's Rich Results Test. In 88% of reviews (**387**) more than the homepage was examined.

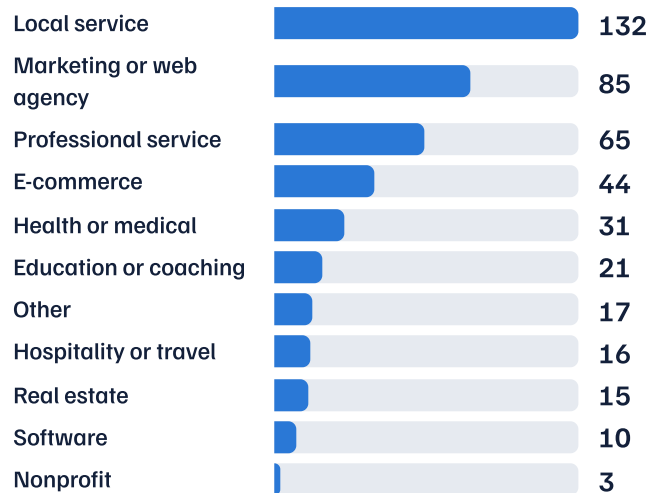
Where the businesses operate

Country as stated or clearly implied in the review. 135 reviews did not make the country clear.



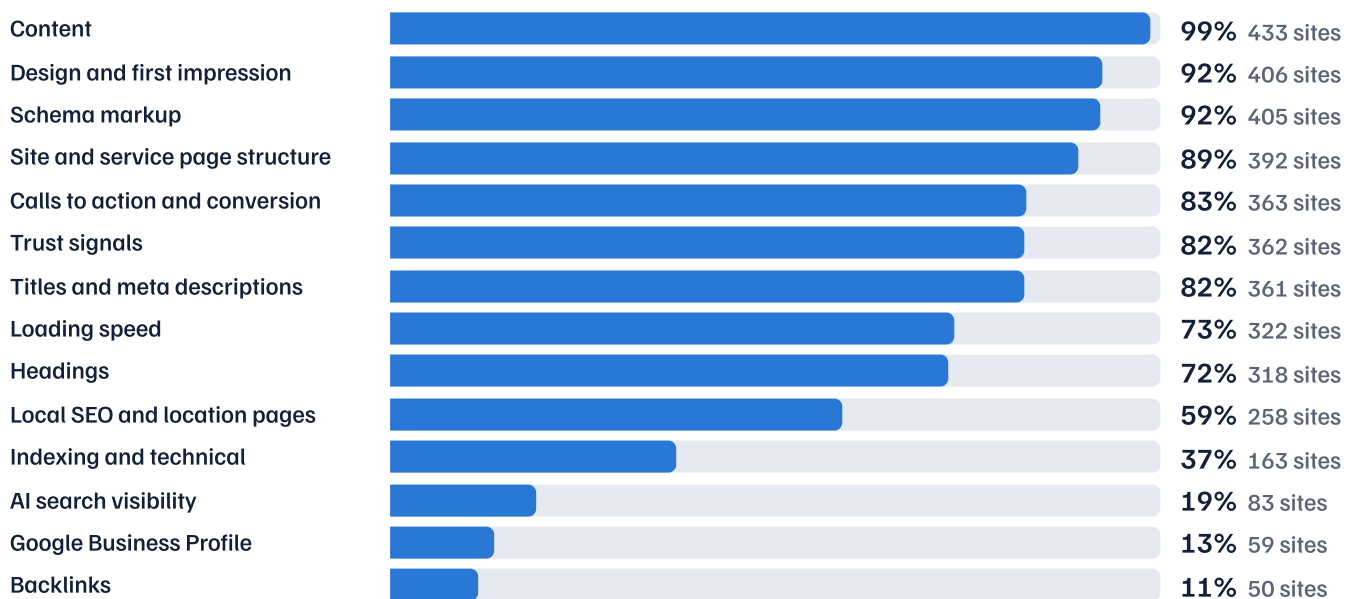
What kind of businesses

Business model of the site reviewed, all 439 sites.



What each review covered

Share of the 439 reviews in which each area was examined. Every rate in this report is calculated only over the sites where that area was actually checked.



When

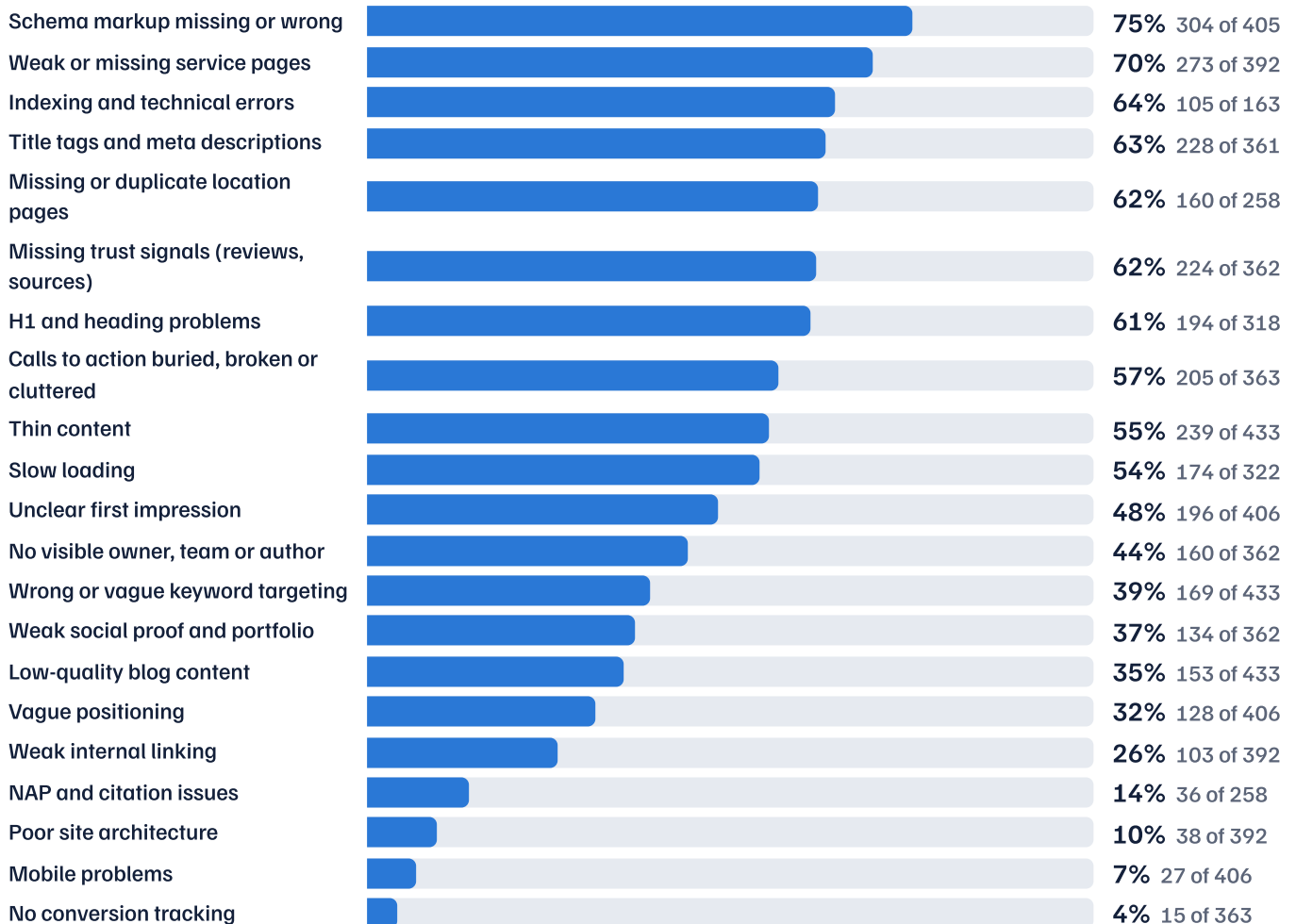
Reviews recorded per month. Volume grew as the community did.



2. The problems, ranked

How often each problem showed up

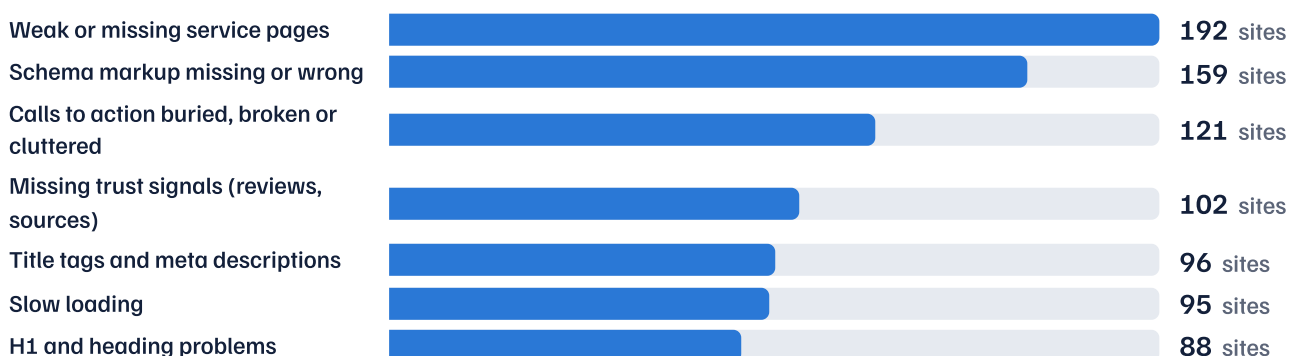
The chart shows the share of sites with each problem, among the sites where that area was checked. The pattern is clear: the most common problems are not exotic technical failures. They are basic decisions about structure, labels and clarity that a website builder cannot make for you.

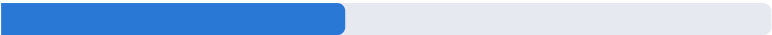


Areas checked on fewer than 150 sites are left out of the ranking because they were mostly examined when something already looked wrong: Google Business Profile gaps (45 of 59 checked) and weak backlink profiles (32 of 50). Full figures are in the data appendix.

What was most often called the top priority

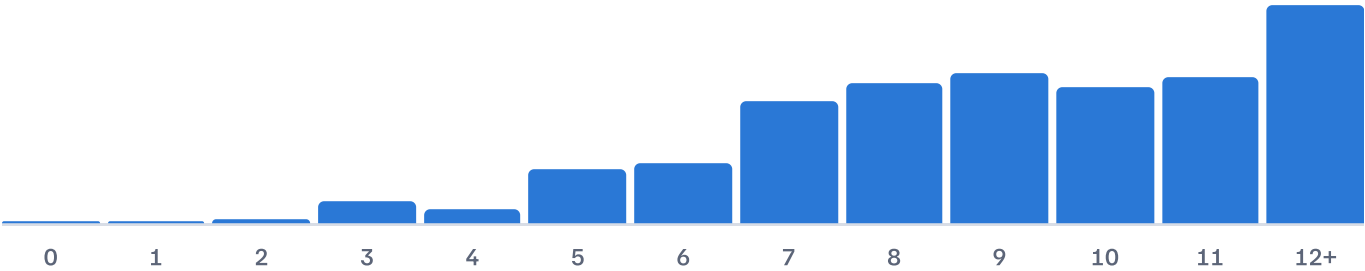
Number of sites where the reviewer treated the problem as high priority (a fix to make first).





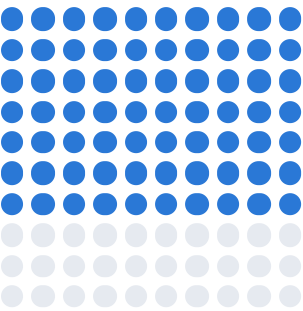
How many problems each site had

Number of sites by count of distinct problems recorded in the review. Most sites had between 7 and 12. The coding recorded at most 12 problems per review, so the last bar means 12 or more.



3. Service pages

One page cannot rank for ten services

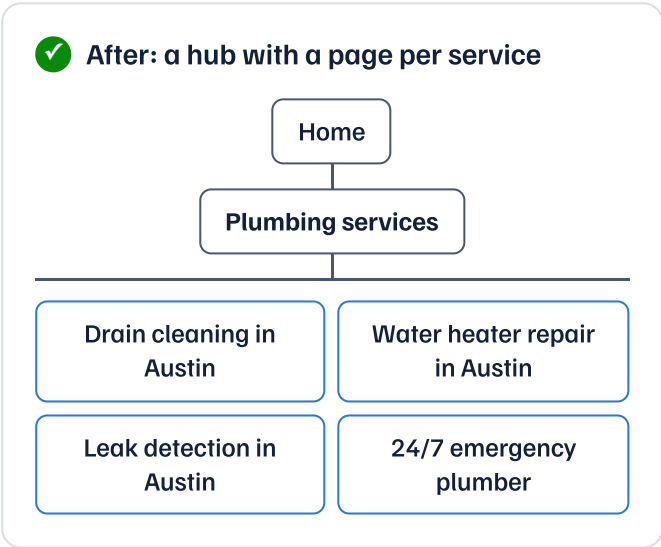
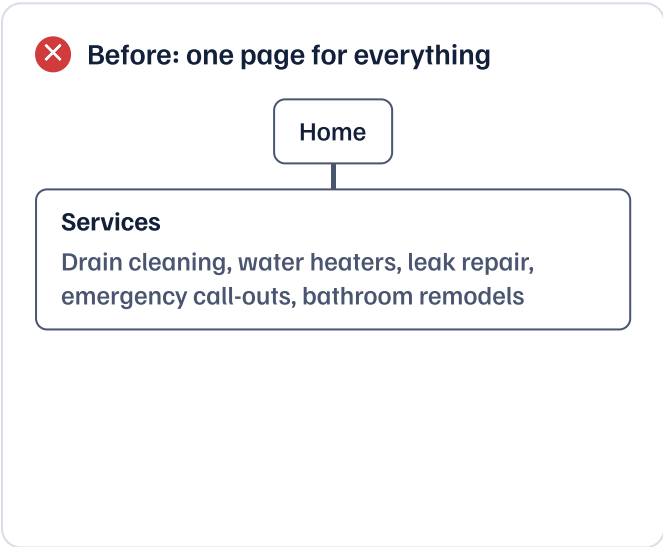


This was the problem most often flagged as the first thing to fix. The usual pattern is a single "Services" page listing everything the business does. Each service then has no page of its own to rank for, and the services compete with each other.

The second pattern is service pages that read like blog posts: lots of explanation, no price range, no process, no proof and no button. Someone searching for a service is ready to buy, so the page should behave like it.

70 in 100

sites had weak, missing or merged service pages (273 of 392 checked)



Illustrative example of the structure recommended in the reviews.

A kitchen exhaust cleaning company in the UAE listed every service on one page.

A law firm in Saudi Arabia grouped consultation, notary and dispute services together, so none could rank on its own.

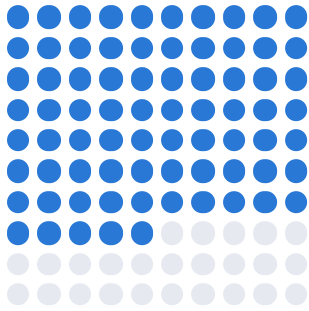
A business coach in Australia had service pages with no pricing, no process, no "who it's for" and no FAQs.

What to do

Build one page per service with a parent hub linking down to each. Give every page the service and location in its title and H1, a clear next step near the top, proof, and answers to the questions buyers ask.

4. Schema markup

Most sites don't tell machines what they are



Schema is the structured data that tells search engines and AI assistants what a business is, what it sells and where. It was the most common problem in the study.

The usual failures: a single generic block copied onto every page, Article markup on a service page, or LocalBusiness markup missing basic fields such as address and phone number, so it fails validation.

75 in 100

sites had missing, wrong or invalid schema (304 of 405 checked)

✗ Typical markup we found

```
{
  "@type": "LocalBusiness",
  "name": "Brightside Plumbing"
  "telephone"    missing
  "address"      missing
  "image"        missing
  "priceRange"   missing
}
```

✓ What a complete version includes

```
{
  "@type": "Plumber",
  "name": "Brightside Plumbing",
  "telephone": "+1 512 555 0142",
  "address": { ... Austin, TX },
  "areaServed": ["Austin", "Round Rock"],
  "aggregateRating": { 4.9, 210 },
}
```

Illustrative example. Add Service, Person and FAQ markup on the pages they describe.

A plumber in California had LocalBusiness schema that failed validation: no name, image, phone number, price range or address.

A digital marketing agency in Australia had only organization schema, with no service or review markup.

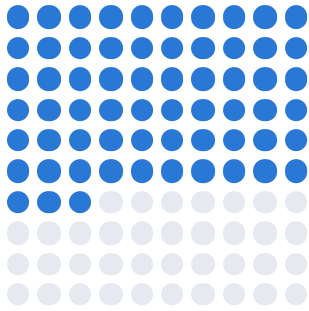
A supplements store in Italy had little or no schema at all on its collection pages.

What to do

Match the markup to each page: LocalBusiness or Organization site-wide, Service on service pages, Person for owners and authors, FAQ where there are FAQs, and review markup where reviews are shown. Then run every template through a schema validator.

5. Titles and headings

The tagline trap



The single most repeated mistake was using a slogan where the keyword should be. A slogan tells a searcher and a search engine nothing about the service or the location.

The other common faults: titles that are just the brand name or "Home", several H1 tags on one page or none at all, and meta descriptions that are missing, cut off or have no reason to click.

63 in 100

sites had title tag or meta description problems (228 of 361 checked). Headings: 61 in 100.

✗ Before: the brand and a slogan

brightsideaccounting.com.au

Home | Brightside

Maximizing your financial success. We are a passionate team of professionals dedicated to helping you achieve your goals...

✓ After: service, place, reason to click

brightsideaccounting.com.au

Small Business Accountant in Brisbane | Brightside

Tax returns, BAS and bookkeeping for Brisbane small businesses. Fixed monthly fees. Book a free 15-minute call.

Illustrative search results. The same rule applies to the H1: one per page, naming the service.

An accounting firm in Australia used its slogan as the main heading instead of the service it wanted to rank for.

A pediatric dentist in California had several H1 tags on the homepage.

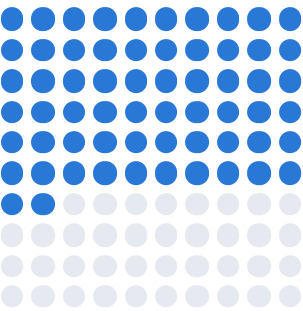
A garage door company in Texas used its tagline as the page title rather than the service and town.

What to do

Write titles as service plus location first, brand last. Use one H1 per page that names the service and keep the tagline as a subheading. Write meta descriptions of roughly 150 characters that end with a reason to click.

6. Location pages

Copying a page and changing the town name doesn't work



The problems split into two opposite mistakes. Many businesses had no page for the areas they serve, so they could not rank there. Others had dozens of near-identical pages where only the town name changed, which search engines tend to merge or ignore.

The working rule of thumb from the reviews: each location page should be substantially different, around half its content or more, with genuinely local detail.

62 in 100

sites had location page problems, among the 258 where local search was reviewed

✗

Before: one page, two town names

Plumber in Round Rock

Plumber in Cedar Park

✓

After: pages that are actually local

Plumber in Round Rock

Recent jobs in Round Rock

Older homes: pipe replacement

Reviews from Round Rock

Map and response time

Plumber in Cedar Park

Hard water and softeners

New builds: warranty work

Reviews from Cedar Park

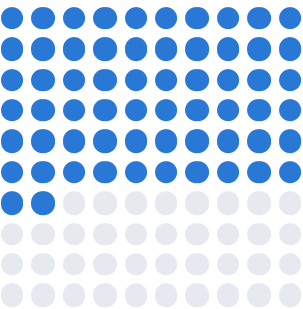
Map and response time

Illustrative example. Shared sections are fine; most of each page should be specific to the place.

An invoice finance company in Texas had area pages that only swapped the place name and a few landmarks.	A psychology practice in Australia targeted the whole country in its metadata, too broad to rank anywhere locally.	A holiday rental site in Spain wrote its town pages as travel guides instead of listing the rentals in each town.
What to do Create an "areas we serve" hub and a page per area that matters. Make each one different: local jobs done, travel time, local conditions, a map, reviews from that area and local schema.		

7. Trust

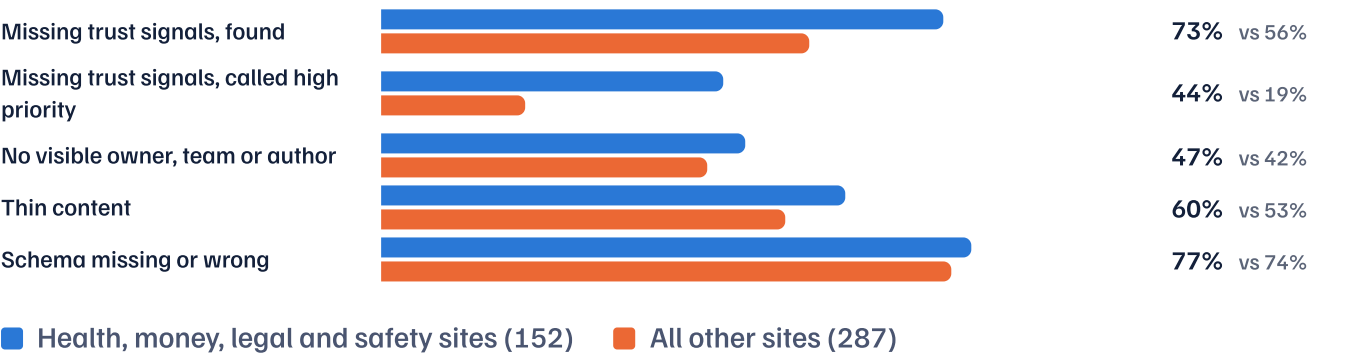
Health, money and legal sites have the most to prove, and prove it least



The gap was widest where it matters most. On sites covering health, money, legal or safety topics, trust problems showed up **73% of the time against 56%** for other sites, and were called a high priority fix 44% of the time against 19%.

62 in 100

sites were missing trust signals: reviews, sources or a named person (224 of 362 checked)



A medical clinic in India made health claims on its blog with no source behind them.

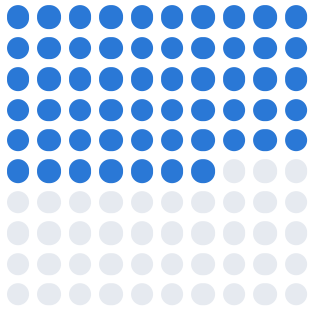
A life insurance broker in Canada quoted national statistics without naming where they came from.

An orthopedic surgeon in Singapore had no patient testimonials on any service page.

What to do Show the people: owner or practitioner name, photo, credentials and a linked profile, with Person schema. Put an author bio on every article. Link each statistic to its original source, next to the claim. Show recent reviews where buyers decide.

8. Conversion

Ranking is half the job



A site that ranks but doesn't turn visitors into enquiries has still failed. Nearly half the sites (48%) also failed the first impression test: within a couple of seconds a visitor should know what the business does, where, and what to do next.

The opposite failure is common too: rotating banners, pop-ups and competing buttons, so the visitor chooses nothing.

57 in 100

sites had calls to action that were buried, broken or cluttered (205 of 363 checked)

 **Before: a slogan and three choices**

Quality you can trust

Welcome to Brightside. Slide 1 of 4

Learn more

Our story

Shop

 **After: what, where, and one next step**

Emergency plumber in Austin

On site within 60 minutes, 7 days a week

Book a plumber

4.9 from 210 Google reviews

Illustrative first screen of a homepage: the two-second test.

A marketing agency in the UK had "book a consultation" buttons that did nothing when clicked.

An engineering consultancy in the UK had no call to action on its service pages. The only button was "view case studies".

A pet products store in Australia opened with a tagline and a discount code, leaving visitors unsure what to buy.

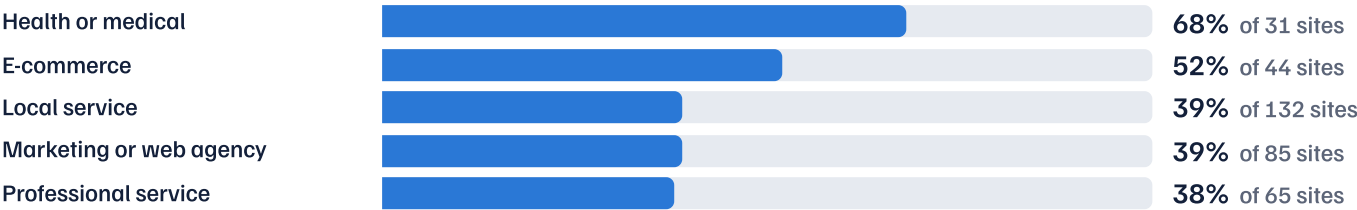
What to do

One primary action, visible without scrolling, in a contrasting colour, on every service page. Click every button yourself. Cut rotating banners down to one message.

9. By business type and country

Who struggles most

Share of sites in each group that the reviewer judged to need significant work. Groups with at least 30 sites.



The three most common problems in each group

Business type	Sites	Median issues	Most common problems
Local service	132	9	Missing or duplicate location pages (75%) Weak or missing service pages (75%) Schema markup missing or wrong (66%)
Marketing or web agency	85	9	Weak or missing service pages (78%) Schema markup missing or wrong (75%) Indexing and technical errors (68%)
Professional service	65	9	Schema markup missing or wrong (79%) Weak or missing service pages (75%) Missing trust signals (reviews, sources) (67%)
E-commerce	44	11	Schema markup missing or wrong (95%) H1 and heading problems (83%) Title tags and meta descriptions (73%)
Health or medical	31	10	Missing trust signals (reviews, sources) (82%) Schema markup missing or wrong (79%) Weak or missing service pages (79%)
Education or coaching	21	10	H1 and heading problems (87%) Thin content (71%) Title tags and meta descriptions (68%)

By country

The three largest country groups. Problems were remarkably consistent across markets: schema and service pages lead almost everywhere.

Country	Sites	Median issues	Most common problems
United States	110	9	Schema markup missing or wrong (70%) Missing or duplicate location pages (68%) Weak or missing service pages (66%)
Australia	56	11	Schema markup missing or wrong (84%) Title tags and meta descriptions (74%) Indexing and technical errors (70%)
United Kingdom	37	9	Indexing and technical errors (80%) Schema markup missing or wrong (71%) Slow loading (65%)

10. What the better sites did

What the strongest sites had in common

Almost every review also named things the site did well. The sites that came out best shared a few traits:

- A homepage that says what, where and what next in the first screen.
- A dedicated, well-linked page for each service, and for each area served.
- Real people on the site: a named owner, a photo, a bio.
- Visible, recent reviews close to the call to action.
- Schema that validates, and pages that load fast on a phone.

None of these needs a large budget. They need decisions made before the design.

11. The fix order

If you only do ten things, do these, in this order

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Pass the two-second test
Say what you do, where, and what to do next in the first screen of the homepage. |
| 2 | Give every service its own page
A hub that links to one page per service, written for someone ready to buy. |
| 3 | Fix titles and H1s
Service plus location in the title and the H1. Brand last. Tagline as a subheading. |
| 4 | Add and validate schema
LocalBusiness or Organization, Service, Person, FAQ and reviews, matched to each page. |
| 5 | Put one clear call to action high on every service page
And click it to make sure it works. |
| 6 | Show who is behind the business
Names, photos, credentials, author bios and Person schema. |
| 7 | Source every claim
Link statistics and health or money claims to the original source, next to the claim. |
| 8 | Build location pages that are genuinely different
Local detail, local proof, a map. Never a copy with the town name swapped. |
| 9 | Make it fast
Convert images to WebP, compress or remove heavy video, and test on mobile. |
| 10 | Check what Google has indexed
Use Search Console, fix pages that are crawled but not indexed, and link blog posts to service pages. |
-

12. Method and limitations

How the videos became data

Source. 439 screen-recorded website reviews made between 25 October 2025 and 29 October 2026 (133 Find the Fix episodes, 306 member reviews). Every review was recorded and transcribed in Tella. Videos shorter than two minutes were excluded.

Coding. Each transcript was coded with a language model (Claude Haiku) into a fixed set of 23 problem categories, each with the fix described and a priority (high, medium or low) as expressed by the reviewer. A second pass recorded the business type, the country, the areas examined and the reviewer's overall assessment. The coding instructions required that only problems and fixes the reviewer actually stated be recorded.

Checks. Two quality checks compared coded records with the full transcripts. In the first (12 reviews), no record was materially wrong and roughly 3 to 5% of individual claims were imprecise, most often a fix described in more detail than the reviewer gave. The instructions were tightened and every review was recoded. In the second (15 reviews), business type was about 93% accurate; country was correct in about 93% of cases but inferred rather than stated in around 40%; the overall assessment matched in about 75% of cases, with the borderline between "mostly solid" and "significant work" the main source of disagreement. Measurements read out during reviews (load times, scores) were too sparse and inconsistent to report.

Calculation. At most 12 problems were recorded per review, so the total of 4,043 is a floor. Every rate counts a site once per category and is calculated over the sites where that area was examined, not over all 439. Areas examined on fewer than 150 sites are reported separately because they were mostly checked when a problem was already suspected.

Limitations. The sample is self-selected: owners who asked for a review, many of them in an SEO community, and more agencies than the general population. One reviewer did every review, which keeps the method consistent but means the categories reflect one practitioner's standards. A problem not mentioned is not proof it was absent. Treat the rates as how often an experienced reviewer flags each problem on sites like these, not as a census of the web.

About

About AI Ranking and how to cite this report

AI Ranking is a community that teaches business owners, freelancers and agencies to do SEO for Google and AI search using AI tools. Nico Gorrone runs the community and records Find the Fix every week. You can submit your own site for a future episode on the [AI Ranking YouTube channel](#).

You are welcome to quote and chart these findings with a link back to airankingskool.com/research/small-business-seo-mistakes. The data is available as a CSV under a CC BY 4.0 licence.

Cite as: Gorrone, N. (2026). *What's really wrong with small business websites: findings from 439 website reviews*. AI Ranking. <https://airankingskool.com/research/small-business-seo-mistakes/>

Data appendix: every problem category

Problem	Sites with problem	Sites checked	Rate	High priority
Google Business Profile gaps *	45	59	76.3%	25.4%
Schema markup missing or wrong	304	405	75.1%	39.3%
Weak or missing service pages	273	392	69.6%	49.0%
Indexing and technical errors	105	163	64.4%	28.8%
Weak backlink profile *	32	50	64.0%	28.0%
Title tags and meta descriptions	228	361	63.2%	26.6%
Missing or duplicate location pages	160	258	62.0%	30.2%
Missing trust signals (reviews, sources)	224	362	61.9%	28.2%
H1 and heading problems	194	318	61.0%	27.7%
Calls to action buried, broken or cluttered	205	363	56.5%	33.3%
Thin content	239	433	55.2%	19.9%
Slow loading	174	322	54.0%	29.5%
Unclear first impression	196	406	48.3%	17.5%
No visible owner, team or author	160	362	44.2%	17.7%
Wrong or vague keyword targeting	169	433	39.0%	18.2%
Weak social proof and portfolio	134	362	37.0%	3.0%
Low-quality blog content	153	433	35.3%	13.9%
Vague positioning	128	406	31.5%	16.7%
Weak internal linking	103	392	26.3%	7.1%
NAP and citation issues	36	258	14.0%	2.7%
Poor site architecture	38	392	9.7%	4.3%
Mobile problems	27	406	6.7%	3.7%
No conversion tracking	15	363	4.1%	2.2%

* Checked on fewer than 150 sites, mostly when a problem was suspected.

AI Ranking research, October 2026. Data: 439 website reviews, 4,043 coded issues. All examples are anonymized: no site, owner or member is named.