SWELL COUNTRY

GROWTH GUIDE FOR RESTAURANTS

Local SEO & Google Business Profile Optimization for Restaurants

When someone nearby gets hungry, they **open Google Maps** before they open anything else. Once you understand how that search works, the work of getting more of those people through your door changes completely.

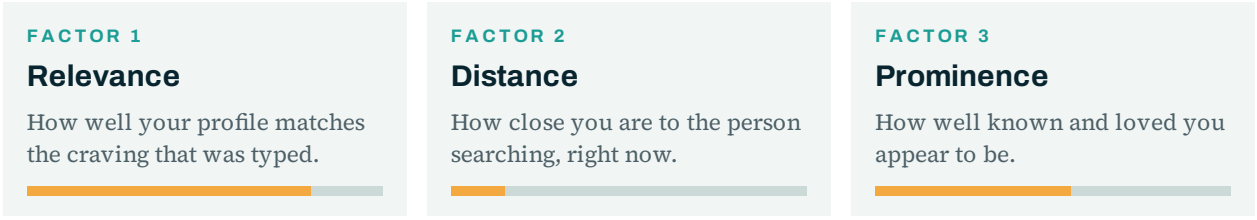
FREE RESOURCE

30 minutes with your profile open

What you are actually optimizing

Most restaurants treat Google like a place to post their hours. It is closer to a host stand on the sidewalk: the moment someone nearby gets hungry, Google decides which doors to show them, and a diner two blocks away sees a different list than one across town.

Google says local results are based mainly on three factors: relevance, distance, and prominence. You cannot pay to rank higher in local results. For restaurants, distance carries extra weight, because “near me” and “open now” searches come from people who are close, hungry, and ready to walk in.



The orange bar is how much you can influence each one. Distance is fixed by where your door is. Relevance and prominence are where the work is, and everything below is about doing that work well.

So you are not trying to game a ranking. You are optimizing three separate things:

1. **Relevance.** Telling Google exactly what you serve, when you are open, and how people can eat with you: category, hours, menu, attributes.
2. **Prominence.** Proof that real diners love you: reviews, replies, fresh photos, and listings that agree with each other across the web.
3. **Foot traffic.** Turning a glance into a table, a pickup, or a walk in, through directions, calls, and reservation and order buttons.

> **Almost every restaurant pours its effort into social media and neglects the profile. For a hungry person on the sidewalk, the profile is the menu, the reviews, and the directions, all at once.**

PART 1 Get the foundation right

Google can only send the right people to your door if the basics are accurate and consistent. These fields are small, and mistakes in them cost you covers.

Business name

Use your real, public name exactly as it appears on your sign and menu. Google’s guidelines do not allow keywords, area names, or promotional text in the name. “Harbor Kitchen” is fine. “Harbor Kitchen | Best Tacos Costa Mesa | Happy Hour” invites edits or suspension, and a suspended profile fills no tables.

Primary category

Your primary category is one of the strongest levers on the whole profile. Choose the most specific option that completes the sentence “this business is a…”, not “this business has a…”. Examples of the kind of category to look for: Mexican restaurant, Pizza restaurant, Ramen restaurant, Coffee shop, Wine bar. Avoid the generic “Restaurant” when a more specific option fits.

- Search the dropdown for the narrowest accurate option, not the broadest.
- After the primary, you can add up to 9 more. Add two or three that are true, such as “Pizza takeout” if you really do takeout, or “Bar” if you really run a bar.
- Do not use categories purely as keywords, and do not borrow a neighbor’s categories if they do not describe you.
- Category names change over time, so confirm the options in your own dashboard.

Address and delivery area

- Use the street address where diners actually walk in. A PO box is not accepted, and an address that is not a staffed location can get a profile suspended.
- Food trucks, ghost kitchens, and delivery only concepts have their own eligibility rules. Read Google’s current guidelines before you create or change a profile.
- If you set a delivery area, list only places you genuinely serve.

Hours and phone

Hours must match reality, including holidays and special closures. Whether you are open can influence results for “open now” searches, and a diner who walks over to a locked door rarely comes back.

- Set regular hours, then add special hours for holidays and events.
- Use the extra hours options to separate the kitchen, the bar, brunch, happy hour, takeout, and delivery, wherever your profile offers them.
- Use one real line that rings at the restaurant and gets answered during service. Keep it identical on your website and every directory.

Website, menu, order, and reservation links

Restaurants can add links for menus, online orders, and reservations. Point the menu link at a current, mobile friendly menu on your own site. Where you can, send the order button to your own ordering page rather than a third party marketplace, which may charge commission on diners who were already looking for you. Publish the menu as plain text, not only a photo or PDF, so Google and people can read it.

PART 2 Earn the click

When your profile appears, a diner takes in a handful of things in a few seconds: photos, name, star rating and review count, category, whether you are open, and the buttons to call, get directions, or order. That is the entire audition.

Your photos

Photos help people decide faster, and a fresh feed shows that the kitchen is alive.

- **Food and drink.** Your best dishes in daylight or good light, shot from above or at a three quarter angle, plated the way guests receive them.
- **Exterior and entrance.** The sign, the door, and the street view. Finding the entrance is a real barrier, especially at night.
- **Interior.** The room, the bar, the patio, and what a full evening looks like.
- **People.** The team, the kitchen, the owner. A friendly face lowers the barrier more than a logo.
- Use high resolution, landscape photos with no heavy filters or text laid over them. Skip stock images, and avoid close ups of guests who have not agreed.
- Add a few new photos every month, especially seasonal dishes and specials.

Your description

Google allows 750 characters, but only about the first 250 are visible before a reader taps “More.” Treat those 250 characters as the entire description and use the rest as a bonus.

[What you serve and your style] + [where you are] + [what makes it easy to come in]

> *“Wood fired pizza and natural wine in downtown Tustin. Patio seating, takeout, and late night slices on weekends. Walk ins always welcome.”*

> *“Family run Oaxacan kitchen in Santa Ana serving mole, tlayudas, and fresh tortillas daily. Dine in, takeout, and catering, with parking behind the building.”*

Leave out links, prices, promotions, and anything that reads like gibberish or keyword stuffing. Google’s guidelines prohibit them, and a rejected description helps no one. Write to one hungry person, not to a crowd.

PROFILE FIELDS

FIELD	LIMIT	SAFE TARGET
Business description	750	700
Visible before “More”	about 250	make it complete
Categories, primary plus extras	**10**	**3 to 4**

Verify these in your own dashboard first

Google changes its interface, policies, and category lists often. Confirm field limits and category names in your own profile before you write, and draft to the safe target.

Menu and attributes

If your profile lets you add menu items directly, add your signature dishes with a short, appetizing line each. Otherwise link a clean menu page. Then switch on every attribute that is true, such as dine in, takeout, delivery, outdoor seating, reservations accepted, good for groups, vegetarian options, and wheelchair accessible. Claim only what you can back up.

PART 3 Build trust that Google can see

Google says review count and ratings can contribute to prominence. They are also the last thing a hungry person reads before choosing where to go, so they work twice.

Reviews, the safe way

- Save your profile's review link and put it where happy guests are: a QR code on the check presenter or receipt, a thank you card, a follow up message.
- Ask at natural moments, and ask steadily. A trickle all year beats a burst once a year.
- Never pay, discount, or reward anyone for a review. Never ask only the happy tables. Staff may not write reviews for their own restaurant.
- You cannot delete a review. You can reply to every one, and you can report reviews that break Google's policy, such as spam or harassment.

> **The most common restaurant mistake**
>
> Offering a free dessert, a discount, or a giveaway in exchange for a review. Incentives for reviews are not allowed, even small ones, and they can get reviews removed or put the profile at risk.

Replying like a good host

> *"Thank you for the kind words. We loved having you, and we hope to see you again soon."*

> *"We are sorry the evening fell short. This is not the experience we want for anyone. Please call us at [number] so we can make it right."*

Reply to the glowing reviews and the angry ones. Stay calm, keep it short, and never argue in public.

Citations and consistency

Google says prominence draws on signals across the web, including directories and articles. Keep your name, address, phone number, and hours identical on your website, Yelp, Apple Maps, Bing, TripAdvisor, your reservation platform, and every delivery app. A delivery app showing the wrong hours sends diners to a closed door and sends the blame to you.

Google Posts

Posts are optional and are not a ranking lever, but a recent post shows the kitchen is active. Use them for specials, events, live music, and holiday hours. Keep email addresses, phone numbers, and unrelated links out of the post text, because current policy discourages them.

PART 4 Turn views into footsteps

- **Call your own number** during the dinner rush. Is it answered? If not, does the voicemail give your hours and address?
- **Test every link.** Menu, order, reservation, and directions, all from a phone, today. Then confirm the order button lands on your own ordering page.
- **Make arrival easy.** Show where to park, which door to use, and any wait. People who cannot find you give up and eat somewhere else.
- **Respond fast.** People choose between several places at once, and the first to answer a question or confirm a table often wins the night.
- **Watch for edits you did not make.** Anyone can suggest changes to your hours or phone number, and third party apps can disagree with you. Check the dashboard weekly, and search your name and address for duplicate listings.

PART 5 Keep it alive

A profile set up once and never touched is the norm, which is exactly why maintenance is an edge.

Monthly, 15 minutes

Open the profile's performance data and look at three numbers: how many people found you, how many called or asked for directions, and how many clicked through to your website. Those three tell you which stage is leaking. Reply to new reviews and add three or four fresh photos.

Quarterly, 45 minutes

Confirm regular and holiday hours. Update the menu and any prices. Refresh the first 250 characters of the description. Re-check your categories, and look for duplicates and suggested edits.

Annually

A fresh round of photos of the room, the team, and the food. Read the whole profile out loud. Ask whether it still describes the restaurant you actually run.

Reading your three numbers

- Few views: your category, hours, or prominence are the problem.
- Many views, few calls or directions: your photos, rating, menu, or hours are the problem.
- Many directions, few diners: what people find on arrival is the problem, such as signage, parking, or a closed door.

Two honest caveats

Claim only what you can deliver. Your profile, photos, and replies are public advertising. Do not list dietary options such as gluten free or nut free unless you can reliably serve them, because guests may rely on them. Alcohol promotion can fall under state and local rules, so check yours. Nothing here is legal advice.

Google is one channel, not a restaurant. Nobody can promise you the top of the map, because results depend partly on where the searcher is standing. Profiles can be edited, flagged, or suspended by a platform you do not control. Treat a strong profile as low hanging fruit, then build what you own: your website with a text menu, your email and text list, and your relationships with the neighborhood.

WORK THROUGH THIS WITH YOUR PROFILE OPEN

The 30-minute checklist

FOUNDATION

- [ ] Business name matches your sign exactly, with no keywords or area names
- [ ] Most specific cuisine category chosen
- [ ] Two or three extra categories, all of them true
- [ ] Address is a real walk in location, or the delivery area is set correctly
- [ ] Regular, holiday, and extra hours (kitchen, bar, happy hour) are accurate
- [ ] Phone is a real line that gets answered during service

CLICK-THROUGH

- [ ] Fresh photos of food, drink, interior, and exterior
- [ ] Entrance and signage photo so first timers can find you
- [ ] First 250 characters say what you serve and where
- [ ] Description has no links, prices, or promotions
- [ ] Menu is current and readable on a phone
- [ ] True attributes switched on

TRUST

- [ ] Review link or QR code ready at the table
- [ ] Every review has a calm, short reply
- [ ] No incentives and no gating anywhere in the review process
- [ ] Hours and address match on Yelp, Apple Maps, and delivery apps
- [ ] Duplicate listings searched for

FOOT TRAFFIC

- [ ] Menu, order, and reservation links tested on a phone
- [ ] Order button points to your own ordering page where possible
- [ ] Phone answered during rush, or voicemail gives hours and address
- [ ] Parking and entrance are easy to find
- [ ] Monthly performance check on the calendar

WORKSHEET

Draft your first 250 characters

The part of your description that almost everyone reads. Work through these four, then write the fifth.

1. Who, specifically, do you most want through your door?

---

2. What are they craving or planning: a quick lunch, a date, a birthday?

---

3. In their words, what would they type into Google?

---

4. What makes it easy to say yes: patio, parking, reservations, hours?

---

5. Now write it as two sentences, under 250 characters, to that one person.

Your profile is one front door. We build the rest.

Swell Country builds growth systems for local businesses: local search, reviews, retention, and follow up that turn first visits into regulars. If this checklist was useful, the free audit goes considerably deeper.

GET YOUR FREE GROWTH AUDIT

swell.country 833-887-9355 hello@swell.country Orange County, California

© 2026 Swell Country. Free to share and print without modification. Field limits and platform behavior described here reflect Google's Business Profile editor and published guidelines as of October 2026 and are worth verifying in your own dashboard before you write. Nothing here is legal advice.