

APRIL 2026

NEWSLETTER



Google's March 2026 Core Update: A Clear Shift Toward Real Value



GBP's 2026 Industry Playbooks: What Local Businesses Should Pay Attention To



GSC Branded Queries Filter Explained: Who Can Access It and How It Works



Apple Maps Just Became a Serious Ad Channel



1

Google's March 2026 Core Update: A Clear Shift Toward Real Value



Google's March 2026 Core Update began rolling out on March 27, shortly after the Spam Update ended. By March 31, ranking volatility had peaked, with noticeable shifts across industries. Core updates typically take about two weeks to stabilize, so fluctuations may continue until around April 10, but the overall direction is already clear.

What This Update Focuses On

This update goes beyond minor adjustments. Google is refining how it measures content quality, focusing less on keywords and more on meaning, originality, and usefulness. In simple terms, content that doesn't offer something new is losing visibility.

Key Changes Driving the Update

- **Information Gain Matters More Than Ever**

Google now prioritizes content that adds fresh insights—original data, real experience, or unique perspectives. Rewritten or summarized content is falling behind.

- **Smarter Semantic Filtering**

A new layer (often linked to "Gemini 4.0") appears to filter out content that feels generic or padded. It's not about AI—it's about depth. Thin, repetitive content is being pushed down.

- **Tighter User Intent Matching**

Pages that answer queries directly are winning. Content that delays answers, overexplains, or adds fluff is losing rankings.

- **Stronger E-E-A-T Signals for Sensitive Topics**

In areas like health, finance, and law, Google now favors clearly identifiable experts. Anonymous or vague authorship is becoming less effective.

Early Trends: Winners vs Losers

Even mid-rollout, patterns are emerging.

What's Performing Well

- Niche experts sharing real insights and experiences
- Community-driven platforms like Reddit, Quora, and Yelp
- Original research, case studies, and hands-on guides

What's Losing Visibility

- Aggregator and affiliate-heavy content with no real value
- Generic informational blogs with no unique angle
- Large-scale, programmatic SEO content operations using standard inputs

Is It Too Early to Judge?

Not really. Most of the impact from core updates shows within the first 3–4 days. While rankings may continue to shift slightly, the overall trend is already reliable.

Spam Update vs Core Update Timing

- Drops around March 24–25 likely came from the Spam Update
- Changes from March 27 onwards are tied to the Core Update

What You Should Do Now

Avoid making drastic changes during the rollout. Core updates often cause temporary fluctuations, and some sites recover as things get stable. The best approach is to monitor performance, gather data, and wait until mid-April before taking any action.

Final Takeaway

This update reinforces a clear message: surface-level SEO no longer works. Google now rewards originality, clarity, and real expertise.

With weekly tracking of **over 350K keywords across 7K+ active campaigns**, we have a strong bird's-eye view of performance patterns, search shifts, and industry-wide movement. The good news is that **our campaigns have remained stable, with no drop in performance observed**. This gives us added confidence that the strategies we implement are robust, adaptable, and built to stand strong in an evolving search landscape.

2

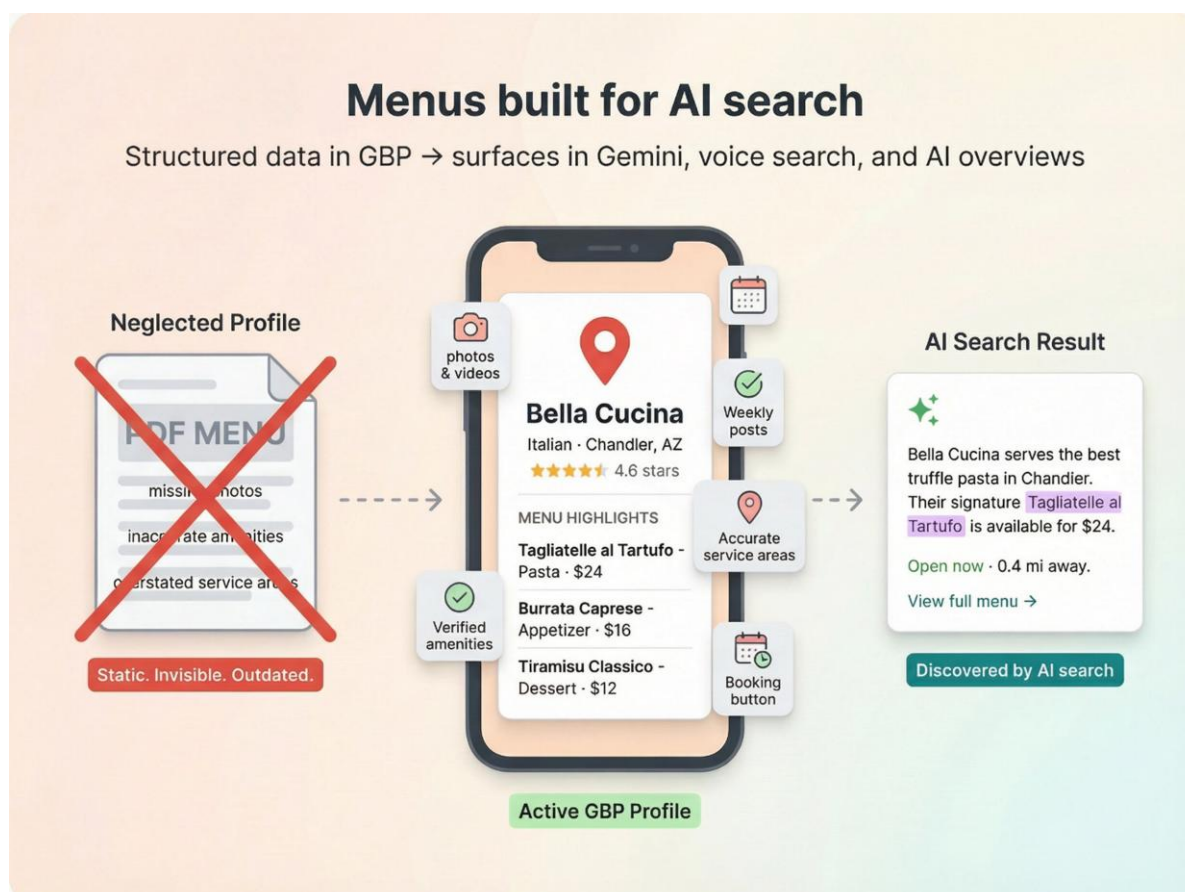
GBP's 2026 Industry Playbooks: What Local Businesses Should Pay Attention To

Google Business Profile is no longer just a place to list your address, phone number, and hours. In 2026, it functions more like a live business data source feeding Gemini-powered results, voice search, and AI overviews.

That means one thing: a neglected profile is no longer harmless. It can directly affect how often your business appears, how accurately it is described, and whether Google trusts it enough to recommend it.

Google recently shared a series of industry-specific optimization playbooks, and while each one focuses on a different business category, the message is remarkably consistent. Businesses that keep their profiles active, accurate, and structured are more likely to win visibility. Those who do not may slowly lose ground.

Restaurants and Cafés: Stop Letting PDFs Do the Work



For restaurants, the standout recommendation is simple: stop relying on PDF menus.

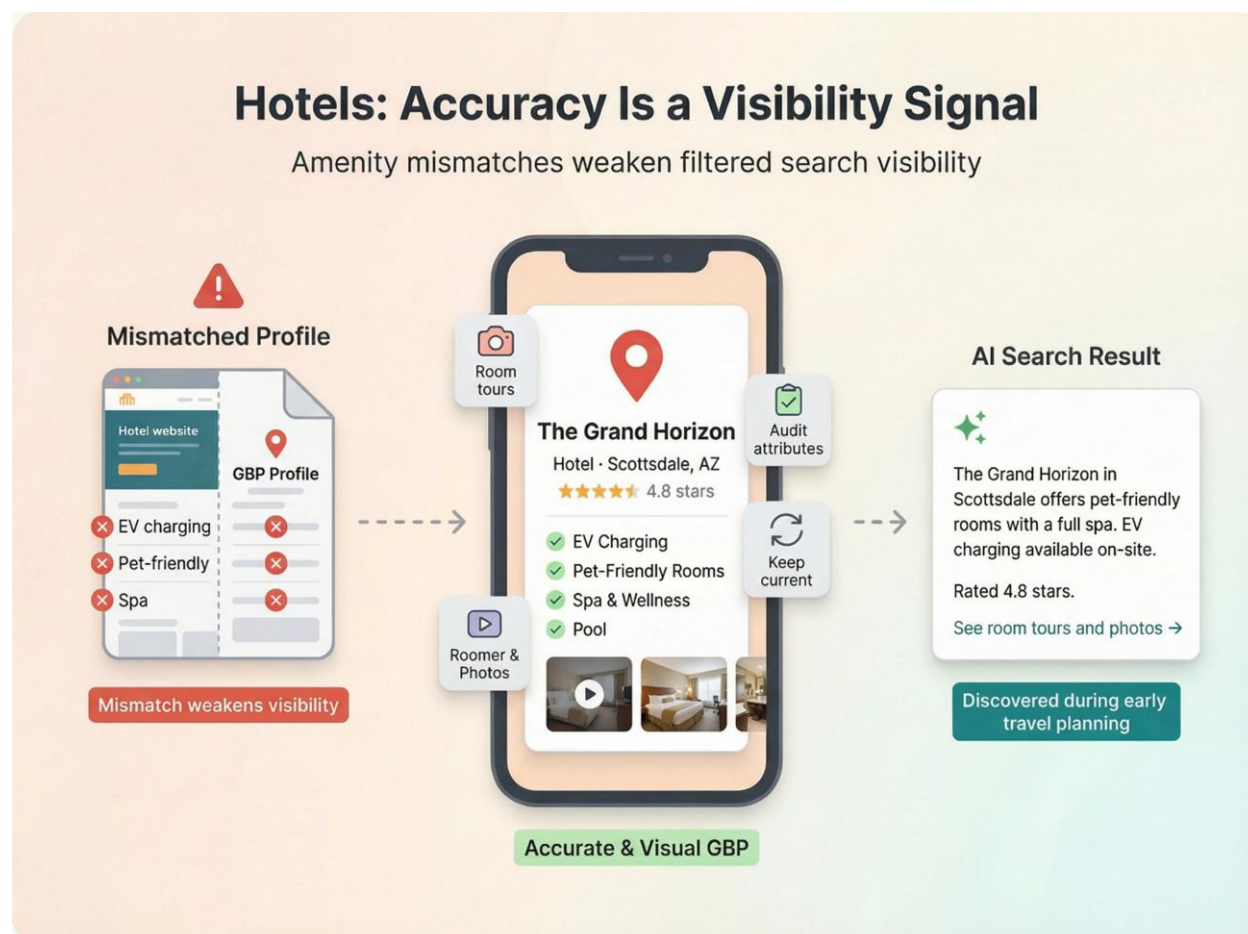
Google wants businesses to enter menu items directly into the GBP menu editor because structured data is easier for AI to understand. A properly entered menu can help your business appear for highly specific searches, while a static PDF often cannot.

What matters most here:

- Structured menus improve discoverability in AI-driven search
- Specific dishes can surface in conversational queries.
- Weekly GBP posts help signal that the business is active.

This is not just about presentation. It is about being searchable in the way people now search.

Hotels and Accommodations: Accuracy Is a Visibility Signal



For hotels, Google's focus is on trust and inspiration.

Your listed amenities need to match what appears on your website. If your site says you offer EV charging, pet-friendly rooms, or a spa, but your GBP does not, that mismatch can weaken your visibility in filtered searches.

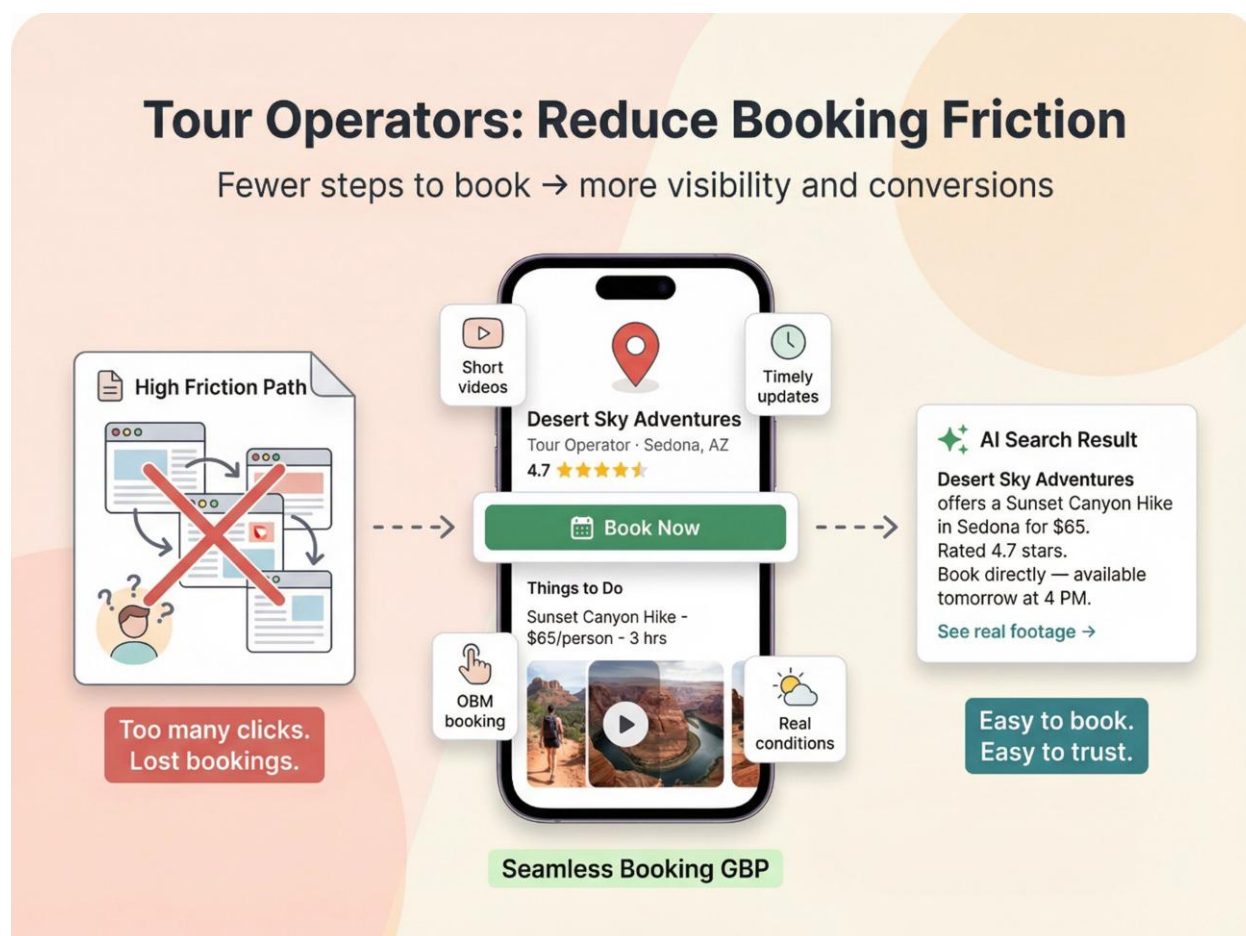
The playbook also emphasizes visual content, especially for travelers in the early planning stage.

Key priorities for hotels:

- Audit all profile attributes against your live website
- Keep amenities accurate and current
- Use strong photo and video content, including room tours when possible.

Travelers often discover hotels before they are ready to book. Visual content helps you win attention earlier.

Tour and Activity Operators: Reduce Booking Friction



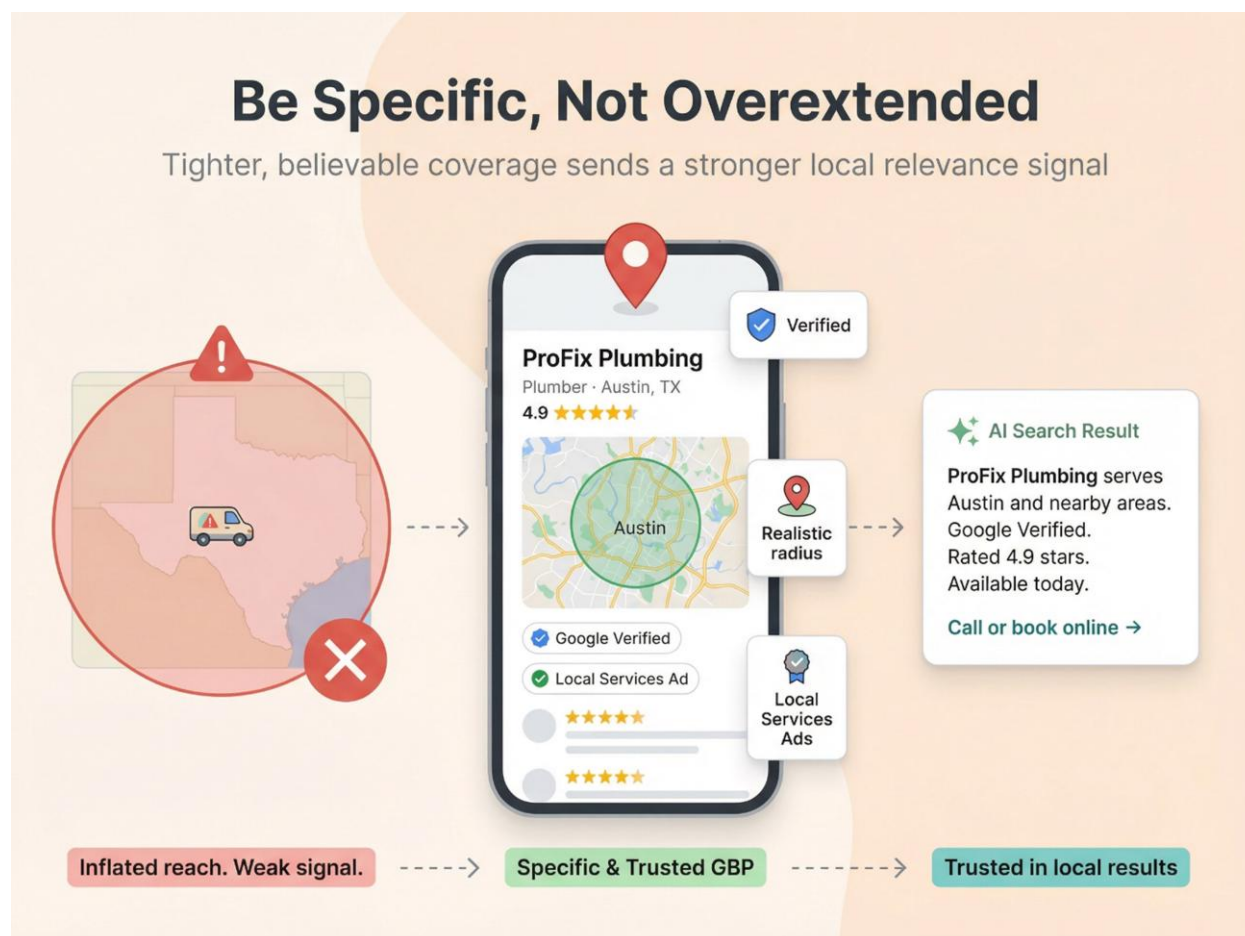
For tour operators, Google is rewarding convenience. If customers have to click away and navigate too many extra steps, that friction can reduce visibility and conversions. Businesses that use the **Operator Booking Module (OBM)** are better positioned because Google can surface their tour products directly within the business profile and broader "things to do" experience. The playbook also highlights the value of short, authentic visual updates. Real activity footage, current conditions, and weather-based content help show the experience as it actually feels.

What operators should focus on:

- Simplify the booking path as much as possible
- Use **OBM** or an eligible booking integration where possible
- Share short videos that reflect the real experience
- Prioritize content that feels timely and believable

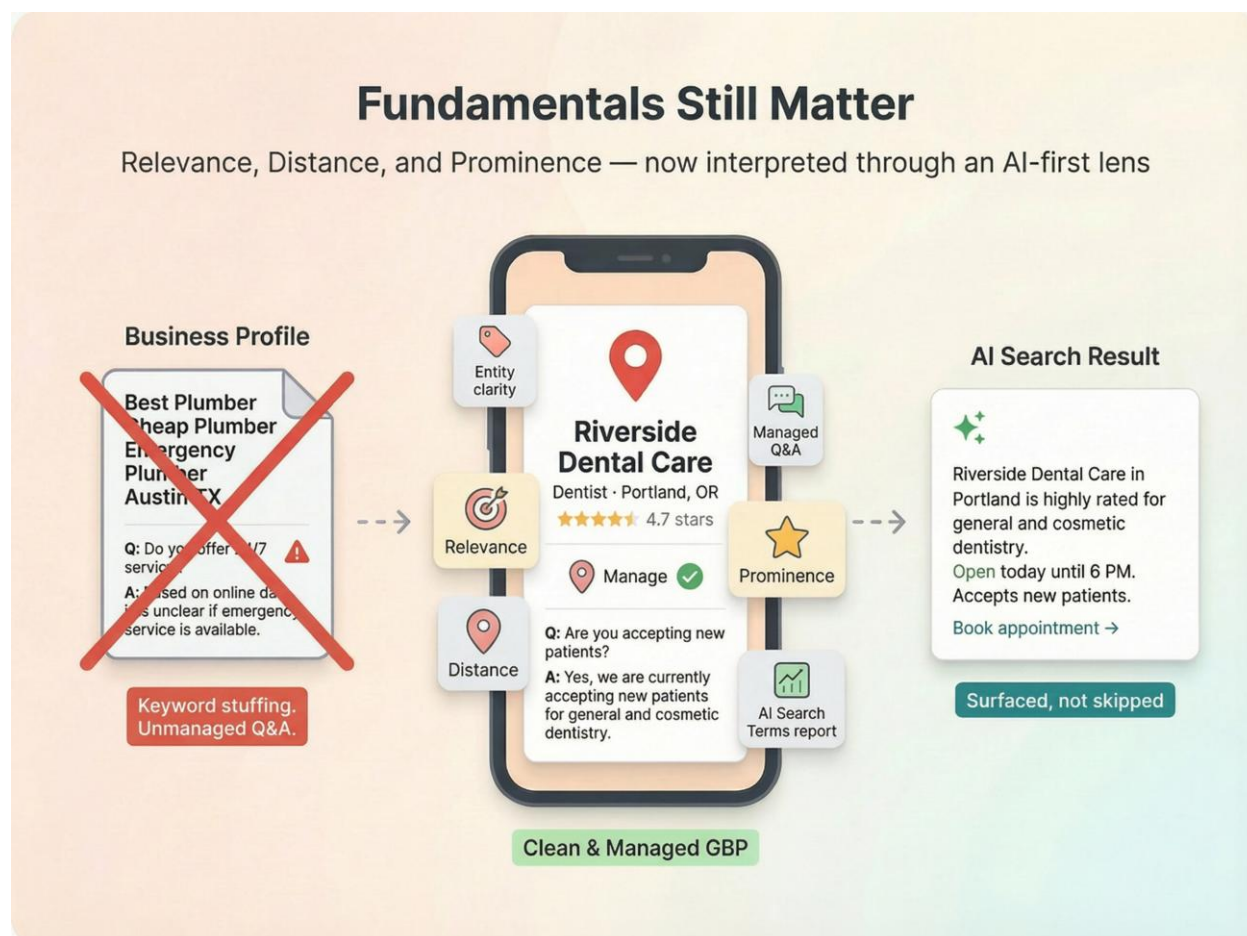
In other words, do not just describe the fun. Make it easy to book and easy to trust.

Service-Area Businesses: Be Specific, Not Overextended



For plumbers, cleaners, landscapers, and other **service-area businesses (SABs)**, Google's message is clear: avoid overstating coverage. Set realistic service areas that match how the business actually operates, since tighter, believable coverage sends a stronger local relevance signal than inflated reach. The playbook also emphasizes trust signals through local services ads and visible verification markers, which can strengthen credibility in local results.

General Businesses: Fundamentals Still Matter



For everyone else, the familiar ranking factors still apply:

- **Relevance**
- **Distance**
- **Prominence**

But now they are being interpreted through an AI-first lens.

A major takeaway is entity clarity. Your business name should match your real-world branding exactly. Keyword stuffing is more likely to trigger issues than help. Google is also encouraging businesses to monitor AI-generated Q&A, since inaccurate responses can now appear without much warning if left unmanaged.

One Update You Should Not Ignore

Google has added an **“AI Search Terms”** report inside GBP Insights, **though the feature is in a phased rollout and not yet live for all users**. This may be one of the most useful features for local businesses right now.

It shows the conversational queries people are using to find your profile through AI-powered search. That gives you a clearer view of how real users are searching in 2026, often in ways traditional keyword tools never captured.

Bottom Line

Across every playbook, the pattern is the same: **active profiles win**.

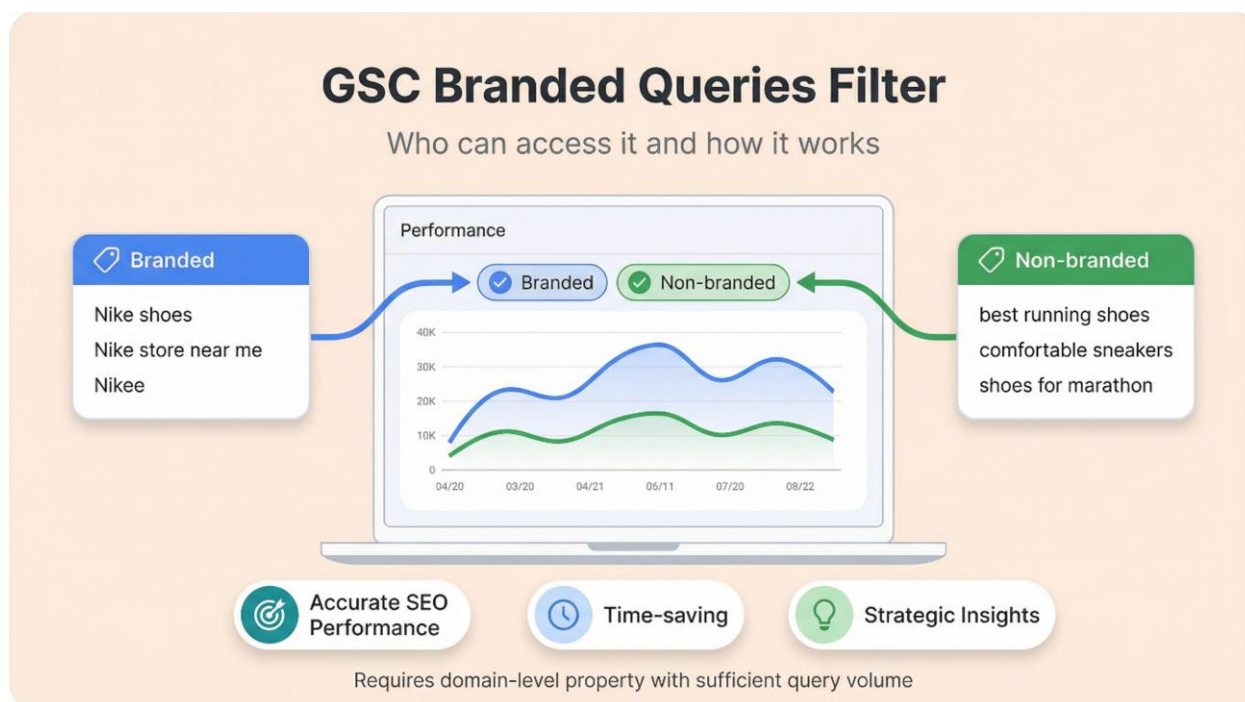
If your photos, posts, attributes, menus, or service details have not been updated recently, you may already be losing visibility to a competitor who is keeping their profile fresh. These playbooks are not subtle hints. They are Google showing businesses exactly what its systems want to see.

Treating your GBP like a living, working marketing asset is no longer optional. It is quickly becoming the difference between being surfaced and being skipped.

Struggling to optimize your clients' Google business listings? Get in touch with our support team for professional Google Business Profile enhancements and optimization that help your clients rank stronger in both SEO and AI-powered search.

3

GSC Branded Queries Filter Explained: Who Can Access It and How It Works



The Google Search Console (GSC) Branded Queries Filter is a new native tool in the Performance report that uses AI to automatically categorize search traffic as Branded (queries containing your brand name/variations) or Non-branded (generic search queries). It enables site owners to assess actual SEO growth by differentiating loyal brand demand from new user discovery without requiring laborious analysis.

What is the Branded Queries Filter?

The filter in question is not a manual filter that has been recently painted. It is a native, AI-assisted classification system that automatically divides your search traffic into two distinct categories, without the need for a regex.

- **Branded:** Consists of your brand name, commonly misspelt terms, and products or services that are closely related.
- **Non-branded:** All other queries—questions in which users did not mention your brand, which represent the discovery of a new audience.

This filter can be implemented in the search results performance report for all search types, including web, image, video, and news. Upon application, metrics, including impressions, interactions, average position, and click-through rate (CTR), will be displayed exclusively for the selected group.

Essential Eligibility Criteria:

- **Property Type:** Must be a domain-level property (e.g., <https://example.com>). The filter is ineffective for subdomains or URL prefix properties (e.g., <https://blog.example.com>).
- **Data Volume:** Your website must have a "sufficient volume" of queries and impressions. Although the precise number is not disclosed, this generally excludes websites that are either new or of a very tiny size.
- **Automatic Identification:** The system operates automatically by utilizing artificial intelligence to identify brand names, errors, and variations. Keywords cannot be manually inserted or removed from this filter.

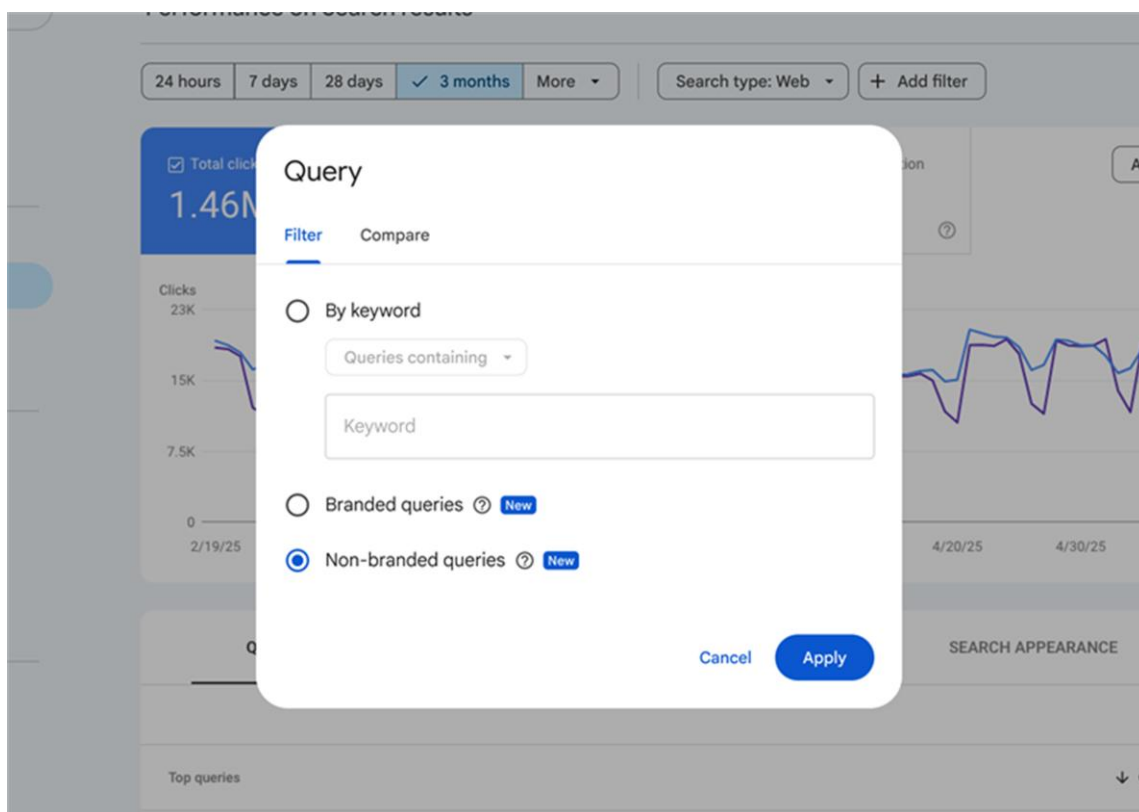
How to Utilize It

- Access GSC by logging in and selecting "Search Results" from the "Performance" report.
- Click on "+ New" at the top of the report, select "Search Type," and select either "Branded" or "Non-branded."
- Evaluate the metrics (position, impressions, views) for the chosen group.
- Evaluate the performance of the two to determine whether the increase in traffic is attributable to brand recognition or discoveries.

Main Advantages

- **Accurate SEO Performance:** Distinguishes between traffic that was acquired through SEO (non-branded) and traffic that was earned through marketing (branded).
- **Time-saving:** Disposes of the necessity to export data and employ intricate regex formulas to identify branded keywords.
- **Strategic Insights:** Assists in the identification of growth opportunities by emphasizing high-volume, non-branded keywords that require improved content.

Why This Filter Matters



Understanding branded versus non-branded traffic is critical for determining SEO success. Branded searches frequently imply high brand awareness, recurring visits, or a direct desire to engage with your company. Non-branded queries, on the other hand, demonstrate your capacity to reach out to new consumers via search.

This filter allows you to:

- Measure how brand familiarity grows over time.
- Determine which pages work best for brand searches.
- Separate SEO efforts focused on discovery from those that reinforce brand loyalty.

It provides a clearer view of how your marketing activities are doing at various phases of the client journey.

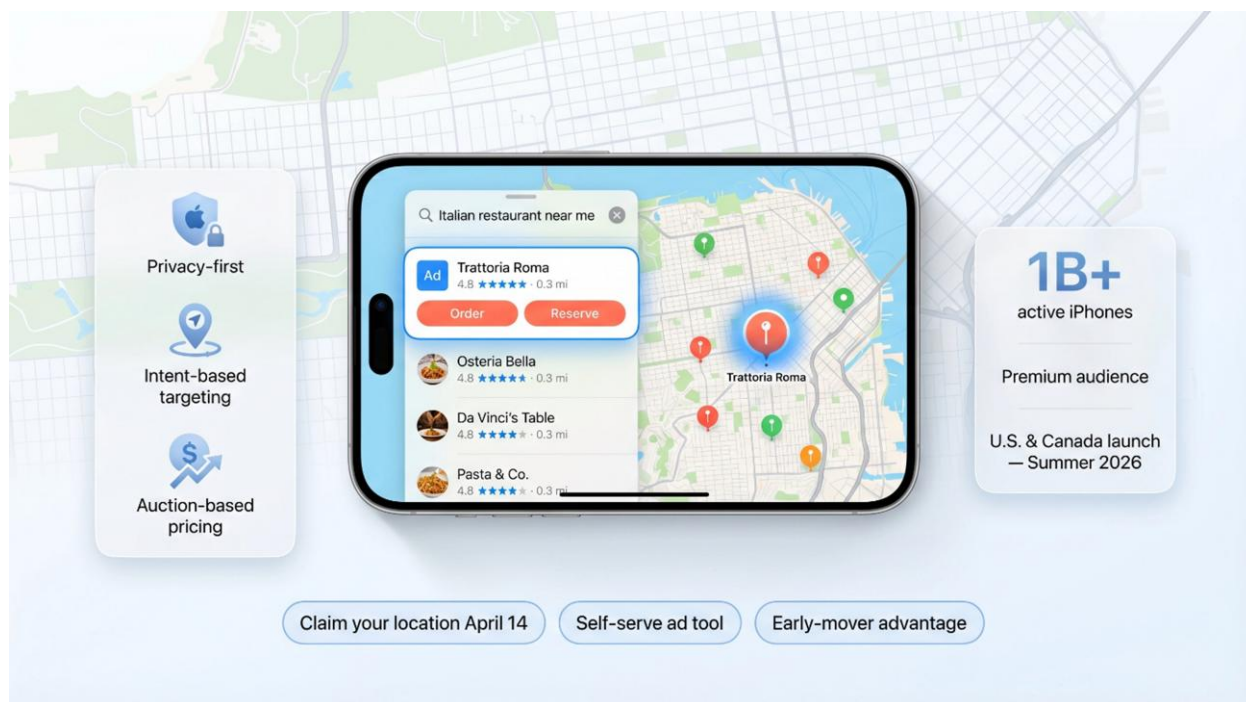
Final Thoughts

The Branded Queries filter is a basic yet effective addition to Google Search Console. Separating brand-driven traffic from general search enquiries allows you to make better educated judgments regarding your SEO and marketing approach.

As Google improves its tools, innovations like these bring us closer to fully understanding how customers locate and interact with our brands online. You may find Google's support documentation [here](#).

4

Apple Maps Just Became a Serious Ad Channel



Apple has [officially confirmed](#) that ads are coming to Apple Maps in the U.S. and Canada this summer. For local advertisers and search marketers, this is a major moment. It is the first meaningful new local ad inventory in years, and because Apple is building it around a privacy-first model, it will not work quite like Google or Meta.

What Apple Maps ads will look like

Apple is reportedly keeping the experience simple. Users will see one ad at a time at the top of Maps search results when they search for relevant categories like restaurants, gyms, coffee shops, or plumbers. Placement will be auction-based, and advertisers will pay based on performance outcomes such as views or taps.

Ads are also expected to appear in a new Suggested Places experience inside Maps. Sponsored pins will be marked with a blue halo, and promoted listings will be clearly labeled as ads. Businesses will also be able to highlight offers, seasonal items, and new products directly on their maps' place cards while adding actions like ordering or reserving that send users to a chosen website or app.

Why Apple's privacy model changes the game

This launch stands out because Apple says Maps ads interactions will not be tied to a user's Apple account. Personal data remains on the device and is not stored by Apple or shared with advertisers.

That means targeting will rely mainly on two things:

- Search intent
- General location context

In other words, Apple is betting that the moment someone searches “Italian restaurant near me,” that intent alone is powerful enough to drive results.

For advertisers, that creates both opportunity and uncertainty. The opportunity is access to high-intent local searches from a premium iPhone audience. The question is whether Apple can make that auction model perform well without the behavioral data many marketers are used to.

Why is this a serious opportunity?

Apple Maps sits inside an ecosystem of more than one billion active iPhones worldwide. In markets like the U.S., iPhone ownership also tends to skew toward higher-income consumers. Apple’s services business has become a massive revenue engine, and advertising is projected to keep growing. Maps ads are clearly part of that expansion. The model itself will feel familiar to search marketers: advertisers bid on relevant search terms, and the winning business gets top placement when users search in a specific area.

How businesses can get access

The starting point is Apple Business, Apple’s new unified platform for business management, launching on April 14, 2026, in more than 200 countries and regions.

Here’s the expected path:

- 1. Claim your location in Apple Business:** Businesses must first claim their map listing.
- 2. Use the self-serve ad tool:** Once Maps ads go live this summer, businesses will be able to create campaigns directly inside Apple Business.
- 3. Agencies and existing Apple Ads advertisers get more options:** Advertisers already using Apple Ads will also be able to buy Maps ads through the existing Apple Ads interface, with added controls like keyword and brand-name targeting.

One important limitation: The rollout is for businesses with physical locations. If there is no physical location, the business will not qualify for the initial launch.

Apple Business is bigger than just ads

This is not only an ad launch. Apple Business also brings together tools previously spread across Apple Business Connect, Apple Business Essentials, and Apple Business Manager. That matters because it adds useful features beyond ad buying, including:

- **Location Insights** for searches, views, and taps
- **Branded communications** in Apple Mail and Wallet
- **Tap to Pay branding** on iPhone payment screens

For local businesses and agencies, that means Apple presence management is becoming much more centralized and measurable.

Why Apple is doing this now

The timing makes sense. Apple is looking to strengthen its services revenue as other major revenue streams face pressure, including App Store regulatory challenges and uncertainty around its search-related payments from Google. At the same time, Apple Maps continues to improve, with upgrades tied to iOS 26, including better route features, visited places, and more natural-language search. A better product, plus a new monetization layer, is a logical next step.

What this means for marketers

Apple Maps ads will not replace Google Maps ads anytime soon. Google still has deeper data and more mature targeting. But Apple Maps is not something local advertisers should ignore. It opens a new channel with high-intent searches, premium users, and likely lower competition in the early phase.

The smart move is straightforward:

- Claim your Apple Business location on April 14.
- Make sure your listing is accurate and complete.
- Prepare to test early when the ad platform launches this summer.

Bottom line

Apple Maps ads are real, official, and coming soon. The platform may be more privacy-restricted than other ad systems, but it could be especially valuable for local businesses that rely on search intent at the exact moment a customer is ready to act. For advertisers, the early-mover window is often the cheapest and most revealing. This one starts on April 14.