FREE DIY PLAYBOOK

The Links & Citations Playbook for Small Business

Earn the local links, listings and mentions that build trust with Google, the safe way.

- Core citation checklist
- 25 local link ideas
- Outreach email templates

SmallBiz Marketing
Written by the SmallBiz Marketing team · smallbizmarketing.net
2026 edition

Why links and citations matter

Search engines treat links from other websites as votes of confidence, and listings on directories as confirmation that your business is real and located where you say. For small businesses, a modest number of relevant, local links and accurate listings is enough to compete.

This playbook covers two related jobs: citations (consistent business listings) and links (other sites pointing to yours).

Chapter 1: Citations

A citation is any online mention of your business name, address and phone number (NAP). Consistency is what counts.

Decide your exact NAP

Write down the one official version and use it everywhere, character for character.

Business name (exactly as on your signage and license):

Address (or service area if you hide your address):

Main phone number:

Website URL:

Core listings for most US small businesses

- [ ] Google Business Profile
- [ ] Bing Places for Business
- [ ] Apple Business Connect (Apple Maps)
- [ ] Yelp
- [ ] Facebook business page
- [ ] Better Business Bureau
- [ ] Nextdoor business page
- [ ] Your local chamber of commerce directory
- [ ] Industry directories for your trade (for example Houzz for home services)

Bing Places

Apple Business Connect

> PRO TIP
> Fix before you add. Search your business name and old phone numbers or addresses, and correct outdated listings first. Wrong listings do more harm than missing ones.

Citation tracker

Site	Listed?	NAP correct?	Login saved?
Google			
Bing			
Apple			
Yelp			
Facebook			
BBB			

Chapter 2: What makes a good link

Good links	Links to avoid
From real local organizations and businesses	Bought links and link packages
From sites related to your industry	Private blog networks
Editorial: someone chose to link to you	Comment and forum spam
Would exist even if Google did not	Link swaps at scale

> IMPORTANT
> Buying links or taking part in link schemes breaks Google's spam policies. It can get your site demoted, and cleanup is slow. One genuine local link is worth more than a hundred bought ones.

Chapter 3: 25 local link ideas

1. Chamber of commerce membership listing
2. Local business associations and BIDs
3. Suppliers and manufacturers: "find an installer" or "where to buy" pages
4. Trade associations and certification bodies
5. Sponsoring a youth sports team or school event
6. Local charity events and fundraisers
7. Hosting a free workshop or class
8. Local news: expert comments, project stories
9. Community blogs and neighborhood newsletters
10. Partner businesses you refer work to
11. Business customers who will feature you in a case study
12. Local event calendars when you host something
13. Scholarships offered to local students
14. Your landlord or business park directory
15. Industry awards and "best of" lists in your city
16. Podcasts and local radio shows looking for guests
17. Guest articles for trade publications
18. Local photographers and designers who featured your space
19. Real estate agents who recommend trusted pros
20. Property managers and HOA vendor lists
21. University or community college program pages
22. Volunteer days with local nonprofits
23. A genuinely useful local guide or tool on your site
24. Original data from your work (for example, average project timelines)
25. Unlinked mentions: ask sites that mention you to add a link

Chapter 4: Outreach that works

Keep emails short, personal and about them. Offer something useful.

Template: supplier or partner

Hi [Name], we have been installing [product] for [number] years and recently finished [project]. We noticed your "find an installer" page and would love to be considered. Happy to share photos of our work with your products. Thanks, [Your name], [Business]

Template: unlinked mention

Hi [Name], thank you for mentioning [Business] in your article about [topic]. Would you be open to linking our name to our website so readers can find us? Here it is: [URL]. Thanks again, [Your name]

Template: local news

Hi [Name], I run [Business] in [city]. With [season or local event] coming up, I could share practical tips on [topic] for your readers, including [one specific, useful point]. Happy to help on short notice. [Your name], [phone or email]

Chapter 5: Reviews and mentions

Reviews on Google and other platforms are a strong local signal and the most persuasive thing a new customer reads. Make asking for reviews part of how every job ends.

- Send your direct Google review link the day the job is completed.
- Reply to every review within a few days, good or bad.
- Never offer payment or discounts in exchange for reviews.
- Never write reviews for yourself or ask staff to.

60-day links and citations plan

Week	Focus
1	Decide official NAP; fix Google, Bing and Apple listings
2	Fix Yelp, Facebook, BBB and old incorrect listings
3	Add 3 industry directories
4	List 25 link opportunities using Chapter 3
5	Contact suppliers and partners
6	Join chamber or local association
7	Pitch one local news or community story
8	Review results; plan next quarter

Keep going

More free DIY playbooks from the SmallBiz Marketing team:

The Small Business SEO Playbook (start here)

The Keyword Research Playbook

The On-Page SEO Playbook

The Technical SEO Checklist Playbook

The Content & Blogging Playbook

The SEO Tracking & Reporting Playbook

The SEO Budget & Hiring Playbook

All free DIY playbooks

Want it done for you?

The SmallBiz Marketing team builds fast, search-ready websites and sets up Google for small businesses. Get in touch through our contact page and tell us what you need.

Get in touch