

# Most Patients Find You on Google Maps Before Your Website — Here's How to Win There

When someone searches "dentist near me" or "emergency dentist" in your suburb, Google shows a map with three practices before anyone scrolls to a website. That map pack is where the choice is often made — and it's free to compete for. Here's what actually moves it.

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## Most Patients Find You on Google Maps Before Your Website — Here's How to Win There

This is general educational material for dental practice owners and managers, not legal or marketing advice. The one regulatory caution (about reviews and testimonials) is a *review trigger* to confirm, not a determination.

A patient wakes up with a throbbing tooth. They don't browse dental websites — they pick up their phone and search "dentist near me" or "emergency dentist [suburb]". Before a single website loads, Google answers with a **map and three practices** (the "map pack" or "3-pack"): name, stars, hours, a call button, directions.

For a huge share of local searches, **the decision happens right there** — on a free Google surface most practices never properly set up. Your **Google Business Profile (GBP)** is, for "near me" searches, doing more work than your website. Here's how to make it win.

### Why the map pack matters more than your homepage

- It appears **above** the normal results for local searches, and it's where high-intent, ready-to-book patients look first.
- It's increasingly a **zero-click** destination: the patient calls, gets directions, or checks hours **without ever visiting your website**.
- AI search leans on it too: Google's AI answers and assistants pull practice details, hours and reviews straight from your Business Profile.

You can have the best website in the suburb and still lose the patient at the map — because the map is a different game, and it's the one being played first.

### What actually moves the map pack

These are the levers, in roughly the order they matter for a single-location dental practice.

## 1. Claim it and complete every field

An incomplete profile is the most common, most fixable problem. Claim the profile and fill in **everything**: exact business name, address, phone, website, opening hours, and your services. A complete profile is shown more and trusted more.

## 2. Get the primary category right

Set your **primary category to "Dentist"** — not the vaguer "Health" or "Medical clinic". The primary category is one of the strongest signals Google uses to decide which searches you show up for. Add relevant **secondary categories** (e.g. Cosmetic Dentist, Emergency Dental Service, Dental Clinic) where they genuinely apply.

## 3. Reviews — volume, recency, and your replies

Reviews are one of the biggest drivers of the map pack, and a **recent 4.7 beats an old 3.8**. Invite happy patients to leave an honest Google review, **respond to all of them** (positive and negative, professionally), and keep them flowing — a steady trickle of recent reviews signals an active, trusted practice.

**One Ahpra caution.** Encouraging patients to leave an honest review **on Google** is generally fine. What's treated differently is **republishing patient testimonials about clinical care or outcomes in your own advertising** — on your website or in your own words. Keep the reviews on Google; don't lift them into your marketing without checking the rules. See [Website Advertising AI Review](#).

## 4. Make your details identical everywhere (NAP)

Your **name, address and phone** should be **exactly the same** on your website, your Google profile, and every directory that lists you (HealthEngine, HotDoc, the ADA find-a-dentist directory, the Ahpra listing, your socials). Inconsistencies — "St" vs "Street", an old phone number, a former address — confuse Google about which listing is really you, and weaken all of them.

## 5. Real photos, accurate hours, after-hours signal

- **Photos** of the real reception, the chair, and the team (not stock imagery) earn more clicks and direction requests.
- **Hours must be accurate**, including public holidays — wrong hours send a patient to your door for nothing and erode trust.
- Add an **after-hours / emergency signal**: the highest-intent searcher is the one looking at 9pm. Make it obvious what to do — an emergency number, an after-hours message, or 24/7 online booking.

## 6. Keep it alive — posts and Q&A

Post occasional updates, and **seed the Q&A section** with the questions patients actually ask (parking, new patients, payment plans, what to do in an emergency). An active profile signals a real, current practice.

### The quick audit

Check	Done?
Profile claimed and every field complete	
Primary category is <b>Dentist</b> (+ relevant secondaries)	
A steady flow of recent reviews, all replied to	
Name/address/phone identical across web + directories	
Real photos (reception, chair, team)	
Hours correct, holidays included, after-hours path clear	
Q&A seeded; the odd post	

### Where this connects

- The map pack is the **local (GEO)** half of being found. The other half — being **cited by AI assistants** — runs on authority and content: see [When a Patient Asks ChatGPT for a Dentist, Do You Show Up?](#).
- The after-hours angle is also a **booking** question — if an urgent patient finds you at 9pm, can they actually book? That's the booking-conversion scan.

### See where you stand

Our free [discoverability scanner](#) reviews your public site for local/Maps signals (the GEO axis) alongside Google search and AI-assistant readiness — a plain red, amber or green read. For the fuller picture across discoverability, advertising-risk, privacy and booking, request your free [practice Blueprint](#). Public information only, no patient data.

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*This guide is educational material only. It is not legal or marketing advice and is not a guarantee of any search outcome. Confirm review/advertising questions against Ahpra's guidance for your circumstances.*

**Disclaimer:** Educational guidance only, not legal advice. This guide is intended for practice workflow education. Do not enter patient-identifiable information into public AI tools.