BROWN BEAR DIGITAL

Plumbing SEO

Where a plumbing company can win page one, from a study of 21 Google results pages.

A plumbing company owner's guide | 2026 edition

By Bryan Passanisi, Founder, Brown Bear Digital

brownbear.digital

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SECTION 01

The short answer

01

When a pipe bursts at 2 AM and someone searches "plumber" plus their city, the first result is often not a plumber. We pulled the top 10 Google results for 21 plumbing searches across 10 US metros. A Reddit thread held #1 for "plumber [city]" in 4 of the 10 cities, Roto-Rooter showed up on 13 of 18 local page ones, and Yelp showed up on all 18. Good plumbing SEO picks the searches a plumber can actually win.

What to do about it:

1

Win "plumber" plus your city in the map pack.

Reddit and Yelp share that page in nearly every city. Put your Business Profile and reviews to work there, and your page work elsewhere.

2

Build real service pages.

Water heater and drain searches reward pages for that service: 15 of 18 and 12 of 13 contractor results pointed at one.

3

Build a true emergency page, or none.

Only 5 of 19 contractor results for emergency searches had an emergency page. It only works if someone answers at night.

4

Publish a local cost page.

Home Depot and Reddit hold #1 on the cost searches. Only 8 of 19 results were plumber pages.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

Across 18 local plumbing searches in 10 metros, independent plumbers held 37% of the top 10 results. Directories and lead sites held 29%, Roto-Rooter, franchises and private equity backed companies 19%, and Reddit, Facebook and other community sites 13%. That 19% took 16 of the 54 top-three spots and 7 of the 18 #1 spots.

Who this guide is for

Owners of independent shops who want to know why Roto-Rooter or a private equity backed brand keeps landing above them, drain and sewer shops that want the most valuable jobs to find them first, and companies that run plumbing and HVAC under one roof.

SECTION 02

The Plumbing Page-One Map

02

On October 22, 2026, we pulled the top 10 organic results from Semrush for "plumber" plus the city in 10 metros, "emergency plumber" in 3, "water heater replacement" in 3, "drain cleaning" in 2, plus two cost searches and one do-it-yourself search. Every result was sorted by who owns it. Map pack, Local Services Ads and regular ads are not counted.

Search type	Who holds page one	What it means for you
Plumber plus city	Independents 36%, directories 31%, Reddit and community sites 15%, Roto-Rooter, franchises and PE-backed 13%. Reddit held #1 in 4 of 10 cities.	→ The head term, shared with Reddit and Yelp. Win the map pack here and put your page work elsewhere.
Emergency plumber plus city	Independents 40%, Roto-Rooter, franchises and PE-backed 23%, directories 23%. A PE-backed brand held #1 in 2 of 3.	→ Few plumbers have a real emergency page, so a true one stands out.
Water heater replacement plus city	Independents 34%, Roto-Rooter, franchises and PE-backed 28%, directories 28%. 15 of 18 contractor results were water heater pages.	→ A real service page is the price of entry. Difficulty 9 to 22.
Drain cleaning plus city	Independents 35%, Roto-Rooter, franchises and PE-backed 30%, directories 25%. The national and PE-backed group held 4 of 6 top-three spots.	→ Drain specialists and national brands own it with dedicated drain pages.
Cost	Home Depot #1 on one, Reddit #1 on the other. 8 of 19 results were plumber pages.	→ Open for a local price page from the plumber who quotes the job.
Do it yourself	A contractor's 400-word page held #1 for "how to unclog a drain."	→ A plumber can win DIY searches by being useful first.

32 of 50

contractor results in emergency, water heater and drain searches pointed at a page for that service. In roofing it was 5 of 57.

28 of 49

contractor results for "plumber [city]" were homepages. That is where your map pack listing and reviews do the work.

Source: Brown Bear plumbing SERP study, Semrush, October 22, 2026. A company counts as franchise or PE-backed only where a public source says so. Roto-Rooter, owned by Chemed, is counted in that group as a national brand.

SECTION 03

Reddit, Roto-Rooter and private equity

03

A Reddit thread appeared on 9 of the 10 "plumber [city]" page ones, sat in the top three in 8 and held #1 in 4: Denver, Houston, Atlanta and Chicago. No plumbing company held #1 for it in more than two cities. Four ranking threads we read kept raising three themes.

- **Price shock.** In Denver, replies called a quoted price "wild" and mentioned paying about $200 an hour elsewhere.
- **Pricing people can follow.** In Chicago, homeowners praised plumbers who broke the job down or used flat-rate pricing.
- **Warnings about named companies.** In Denver and Phoenix, replies warned readers off companies that also rank on page one.

Four practical moves:

1. **Search Reddit** for your city plus "plumber," "water heater" and "drain,"
2. **Explain your pricing on your site:** how you charge, what a trip fee covers, what a typical job costs.
3. **Never post fake recommendations**. Moderators spot it, and a callout can rank as long as the thread does.
4. **Ask customers who felt the price was fair** to mention you by name when a neighbor asks for a plumber.

The national brands

Roto-Rooter appeared on 13 of 18 local page ones and held #1 for "plumber phoenix," "plumber tampa" and "drain cleaning charlotte." With the franchises and private equity backed companies, that group showed up in 17 of 18 local searches. Every one of Roto-Rooter's 13 results was a city page or a city service page, never its homepage.

Independent shop

Don't fight Roto-Rooter's city page for the core city. Win the map pack near your shop and build service pages.

Franchise territory

Your brand's site may already rank. Your job is the profile, reviews and suburb pages.

Plumbing and HVAC

The same buyers show up in both trades. Brown Bear's HVAC SEO study covers that side.

SECTION 04

Emergency, water heater and drain pages

04

Emergency searches are the one plumbing lane where pages are missing: only 5 of 19 contractor results pointed at an emergency or 24-hour page. They pay well. Semrush puts "emergency plumber las vegas" at about $72 a click, and "emergency plumber near me" draws about 135,000 searches a month.

A real emergency page states:

- The hours a person answers the phone, and the hours a truck goes out
- How fast you usually arrive in each part of your service area
- After-hours and weekend pricing, or how you quote it
- What to do while you wait, such as how to shut off the main water valve
- The phone number, visible without scrolling, as a click-to-call link

If you don't run nights, don't build the page. Own same-day service instead, and say so on your profile and service pages.

Water heater and drain pages

These searches pulled mostly different companies from the plumber results in the same city. In Phoenix, Denver, Tampa and Charlotte, only 3 domains on each service page one also ranked for "plumber" there.

Page	What it should answer
Water heater	Tank and tankless, gas and electric, the brands you install. What the price includes, such as haul-away, permits and code updates. A price range or how you quote, install timing, warranty, and phone and booking visible without scrolling.
Drain and sewer	Camera inspection, hydro jetting, main line clogs and sewer line repair or replacement, each with what you check first and how you price it. "sewer line repair" draws about 90,500 searches a month.
City pages	Only for places you serve, with something true about each: home age, pipe materials or hard water. Swapping the city name into the same 600 words gets filtered out.

SECTION 05

Business Profile, lead sites and reviews

05

The Business Profile drives the map pack, above every organic result we counted. Google's guidelines use a plumber as their example.

- **Run it from home?** Clear the address from the profile.
- **Service-area business:** one profile for the central office, with a designated service area no farther than about 2 hours of driving.
- **No mailbox or virtual office,** and no extra words in the name. "Smith Plumbing" can't become "Smith Plumbing 24 Hour Drain Cleaning Houston."
- **Several staffed offices** can each have a profile, city page and review flow. Don't create profiles for towns where you have no office.
- **Fill it out:** primary category, every service, real job photos, and hours someone answers.
- **Match your details everywhere.** In Bryan's AI visibility audits, odd variations in name, address or phone are the most common actual error, and the easiest to fix.

The lead sites on your page one

Yelp appeared on all 18 local page ones and sat in the top three in 7. Thumbtack appeared on 12, Angi on 6, the BBB on 4 and Craigslist on 4. Be the obvious pick there too: complete profiles, real photos and reviews that name the work. License lookups rank too, such as Chicago's list of licensed plumbing contractors at #3, so show your license number, issuing authority and insurance on every service page.

Reviews that name the job and the price

Google says more reviews and positive ratings can help local ranking. In the threads, praise went to plumbers who explained what the customer was paying for, showed up within hours on an emergency and cleaned up after themselves.

1. **Ask by text when the job is done,** with a direct link.
2. **Ask customers to mention the job,** such as "water heater replacement," and whether the price matched the quote.
3. **Reply to every review,** including the bad ones, in a calm sentence or two.

SECTION 06

Cost pages, DIY pages and AI search

06

Search	Monthly searches	Who holds the top
water heater replacement cost	About 27,100	Home Depot #1, a Reddit thread #2, a contractor's Facebook video #3
sewer line replacement cost	About 2,900	A Reddit thread #1. Semrush lists an AI Overview.
how to unclog a drain	About 5,400	A contractor's roughly 400-word page #1, at difficulty 8

A plain cost page from the company that does the work can compete here. Give real ranges for your market, explain what moves the price, such as tank or tankless, gas or electric, permit and code work, or the length and depth of a sewer line, and say how you quote.

The DIY result is the surprise: an Atlanta-area contractor's short page on wrong ways to clear a drain beat Reddit and Home Depot. Write the few that lead to your best jobs, such as when a slow drain means a main line problem or how to tell a water heater is failing, and end each by saying when it's time to call.

> **A COST PAGE NO RETAILER CAN WRITE**
>
> Picture a plumber in Tampa who publishes "What a Water Heater Replacement Costs in Tampa": a range for a standard tank, a range for tankless, what permits add and how to get a written quote. It gives every homeowner comparing quotes a reason to call first.

Technical basics and AI search

- **A fast mobile page,** a one-thumb click-to-call number, forms that work on a phone, and a menu that links every service and city page.
- **Schema is worth having,** but Bryan's view is that it is rarely the lever. Crawlable pages with clear answers matter more.
- **Third-party sites shape what AI says.** Directories, review sites, Reddit threads and city license lists held a large share of page one, and AI answers draw on those sources.
- **Get your business facts straight everywhere first:** one name, one phone number, one license number and one clear list of services.

SECTION 07

Cost, timing and hiring help

07

2026 agency price guides mostly put plumbing SEO at about $1,000 to $5,000 a month, more for big metros. Paid clicks are steep: Semrush puts "plumber denver" at about $86 a click and "plumber phoenix" at about $74.

The payback worksheet

Step	The math	Your number
1. Total investment	Monthly SEO spend times months. 12 is a fair first look.	_____
2. Value per booked job	Average revenue per booked job, times gross margin if you use one	_____
3. Jobs to break even	Step 1 divided by step 2, rounded up	_____
4. Calls needed	Step 3 divided by the share of calls that book	_____

A $2,000 monthly program over 12 months is $24,000. At $1,200 of gross profit per water heater replacement, 20 installs cover it. At $150 per drain call, it takes 160.

> **HOW LONG IT TAKES DEPENDS ON THE LANE**
>
> Water heater, drain, sewer and emergency pages in your suburbs face a smaller set of competitors and can bring calls within a season or two. "Plumber" in a big metro takes a year or more. Cover the gap with Google Ads or Local Services Ads.

Ask an agency for 4 things before you sign

1. **A page-one review of your top 5 services in your main towns,** by type of result.
2. **A Business Profile plan** that follows Google's service-area rules, with no fake offices.
3. **Reporting on calls and booked jobs by service,** not just rankings and traffic.
4. **An emergency page plan** that matches the hours you actually answer the phone.

SECTION 08

Is your plumbing SEO aimed at searches you can win?

Answer for your company as it stands today. Each "no" is a gap. Start with the lanes the Page-One Map marks as most open: water heater, drain, emergency and cost searches.

Question	Yes	Partly	No
SEARCH TARGETING			
Have you checked who holds page one for your top 5 services in your main towns?	☐	☐	☐
Have you moved effort for "plumber" plus your city from organic rankings to the map pack?	☐	☐	☐
Have you read the Reddit threads that rank for "plumber" in your city?	☐	☐	☐
PROFILE AND LISTINGS			
Does your Business Profile follow the service-area rules, with no fake offices and no extra words in the name?	☐	☐	☐
Are your name, address, phone and license number identical on Google, Yelp, Thumbtack, Angi, the BBB and your site?	☐	☐	☐
Do your profile hours match when a person actually answers the phone?	☐	☐	☐
PAGES			
Do water heater and drain services each have their own page with options, what the price includes and how you quote?	☐	☐	☐
If you run nights, does your emergency page state hours, arrival times, after-hours pricing and a click-to-call number?	☐	☐	☐
Do you have a local cost page for your biggest jobs, with real ranges for your market?	☐	☐	☐
TRUST AND TRACKING			
Do you ask for reviews by text that name the job and whether the price matched the quote?	☐	☐	☐
Does every service page show your license number, issuing authority and insurance?	☐	☐	☐
Do you track calls and booked jobs by service, and by SEO versus paid ads?	☐	☐	☐

YES	PARTLY	NO
_____	_____	_____

SECTION 09

Frequently asked questions

09

Q **Why does a Reddit thread outrank my company for "plumber" in my city?**

A thread appeared on 9 of the 10 "plumber [city]" page ones we pulled and held #1 in 4. You won't remove it. Read it, answer its pricing questions on your own site, and compete for the head term in the map pack.

Q **Can an independent shop beat Roto-Rooter?**

Not head-on for "plumber" in the core city, where its city pages rank. In water heater, drain and emergency searches independents held 34% to 40% of results, and focused shops ranked on their own.

Q **Should I build an emergency page?**

Only if someone answers at night. Few contractors have one, so a true page stands out. If you don't run nights, own same-day service instead.

Q **Should I publish prices?**

Yes, as ranges for your market, with what moves the price and how you quote. Pricing people can follow is what the Reddit threads keep asking for, and cost searches are mostly held by Home Depot and Reddit.

Q **How long does plumbing SEO take?**

Service pages in your suburbs can bring calls within a season or two. "Plumber" in a big metro takes a year or more.

Q **Does AI search change the plan?**

It raises the stakes on the same work: consistent business details, reviews and pages that answer specific questions clearly. Directories, review sites and Reddit threads shape what AI tools say about you.

SECTION 10

Next steps

10

1. **Run the self-audit** on the previous pages. Be honest.
2. **Search your top 5 services in your main towns** and note who holds page one for each.
3. **Build the first service page or cost page** in the most open lane, and clean up your Business Profile.
4. **Talk to someone who does this for home service companies.** A clear look at which searches your shop can win, and which to stop paying for.

WORK WITH BROWN BEAR

Brown Bear builds the page-one map first, then does the profile, page, review and AI search work that follows from it. brownbear.digital/industries/plumbers | bryan@brownbear.digital

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Bryan Passanisi

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Passanisi is the founder of Brown Bear Digital. He has 15 years of experience across SEO, paid search, and AI search strategy, and received a 2025 Semrush AI Visibility Award with the QuickBooks team. He started Brown Bear to give businesses direct access to senior search expertise without the agency overhead.

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