

Google's New 'Ask For Me' Reviewed: Is This Bad For Local Businesses?

We have been testing Google's newest "Ask For Me" Search Lab test.

It is quick, easy, and impressive technology to request local quotes, but it is not at all clear that it is good for small businesses.

At the end of January, Rose Yao, a product lead at Google, announced a new Search Lab test ("Ask for Me") that uses Google Duplex to automate calls to local businesses "to find out what they charge for a service and when it's available."

It's testing in two categories to start: automotive service/repair and nail salons. And we just got access.

When your search query falls within one of the two test categories (e.g., oil change), the Ask for Me module appears under the Local Pack with a large call to action that encourages users to "Get started."

Ask for Me Module, CTA (Screenshot from search, Google, February 2025)

The Ask For Me Experience

It then asked what service I needed and gave me a list of 20, from factory-scheduled maintenance to vehicle leaks. I chose “oil change” and provided complete details about my car’s make, model, year, and mileage.

I indicated my desired scheduling and preferred communication method (email or SMS) – and we were off to the races.

It took me 96 seconds, but I wasn’t clear on all of the choices. In practice, it takes less than one minute once you are familiar with the process.

What Happened After Submitting A Form?

From the time I submitted the form, it took 17 minutes to receive a response.

I was given a summary of prices and availability from the three businesses that answered the phone. Additionally, I was notified that five businesses couldn't be reached.

Screenshot from search, Google, February 2025

Google called eight of the top nine listings in the Local Finder. The one not called was Walmart.

The businesses that responded were ranked second, third, and seventh on the Finder list.

In a second test, requesting a tire purchase and installation, Google called 11 businesses.

Six of those answered and provided information. Five of the calls went unanswered. Exactly how many locations Google will call is still TBD.

If you call after hours, Google will send back an email indicating that it will call once the businesses are open.

Screenshot of author's email, February 2025

How This Could Be A Problem For SMBs

Google Duplex was launched in 2018, using AI “for conducting natural conversations to carry out “real world” tasks over the phone.”

That year, Google implemented a similar solution for restaurant reservations, allowing users to click a reservation button and let Google handle the process. That system is beneficial for both the user and the restaurant.

However, “Ask for Me” is different. It functions more like a

Request for Proposal (RFP), letting users quickly contact multiple repair shops with minimal effort.

Even worse, it effectively pits one shop against another, which, if it were to become widely adopted, could drive auto repair shop profits down.

The product also creates additional work for local businesses.

Until auto repair shops adopt automation and bots to handle these calls, staff will be burdened with calls that take just as long as regular ones – but with less direct customer interaction and a lower chance of closing a sale.

In a nutshell, here's what's wrong from a business point of view (POV):

- Businesses learn nothing about the potential customer.
- Callers learn nothing but price and availability about the business.
- Local services become further commodified.

There are obvious spam implications: local black hats using Ask for Me calling to waste a competitor's time.

In addition, this puts pressure on local merchants to “low ball” when Google calls and potentially do a “bait and switch” when the customer actually appears.

Only A Test

As I noted in our most recent podcast, the Ask for Me test is dramatically more limited than most Google tests.

Normally, Google releases its early work on some percentage of searchers (e.g., 1%). Then, if successful, it will show the test to 10%, and so on, until a full rollout.

In this case, the user has to opt in via Search Labs, which will significantly limit the test's scope. Unless this is a PR

ploy, it would appear that Ask for Me is not ready for even a 1% rollout.

How To Opt Out From Ask For Me Duplex Calls

Businesses can opt out of receiving these calls, but the process is somewhat complicated and requires a verified profile.

To opt out of Google Duplex calls for your business, you can:

- Go to your Business Profile. Select the three-dot menu.
- Select Business Profile settings.
- Select Advanced settings.
- Under “Google Assistant calls,” turn off “Bookings from customers” or “Automated calls.”

Screenshot from Google Business Profile, February 2025

Final Thoughts

We are just beginning to experience the reality of bots (AI agents) interacting with our businesses.

While those obsessed with efficiency may see the appeal, I'm not convinced this will actually be efficient in practice.

It looks more like a battle of attrition, with Google generating more calls and businesses wasting time quoting prices – only to lose sales to the lowest bidder.

In the process, a lot of time is wasted.

More Resources:

Featured Image: PeopleImages.com – Yuri A/Shutterstock

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/google-ask-for-me-is-this-bad-for-local-businesses/539882/>