Google’s new Small Business Advisors program aims to help SMBs grow

Google has beta-launched a program for small businesses (SMBs) to help them become better marketers on Google. Called Small Business Advisors (SBA), the program offers 50-minute individualized consulting sessions on a range of products from Google My Business to Ads and Analytics to YouTube.

No enterprises or agencies. Google told me in an email that the program is “is open to small businesses in the United States with an active Google account. Large businesses, marketing and SEO agencies are not eligible to participate.” The cost is $39.99 per session. There’s no fee through the end of 2020.

Small business doesn’t appear to be defined, so theoretically companies with up to 100 employees or even 499 employees (the U.S. Small Business Administration definition). As a practical matter, the program will likely be utilized by very small businesses with relatively few employees. Suspended accounts aren’t eligible to book an appointment and must get reinstated before gaining access to the program.

Don’t call it ‘Google Care.’ When I first heard of this, Apple Care came to mind. However, the company says this is not an enhanced version of Google support – although many may be tempted to see it that way. Support, Google says, is intended for troubleshooting around discrete problems, such as reinstatement or merger of duplicate listings.

Google SBA is intended to help business owners become more proficient in the use of Google products. Advisors will do “pre-appointment research to come prepared and make the most of your 50-minute appointment.”

Google says SBA is specifically designed for business owners who:

- Feel overwhelmed or uncertain about your business's online presence.
- Have advanced product questions.
- Don't have an online marketing specialist or outside marketing agency.
- Have never used Google products.

The program cannot be used for real-time GMB verification.

Depending on the survey you consult, anywhere from between 60% to 70% of SMBs don't work with marketing agencies and are trying to manage digital marketing in house.

Video chat and screen sharing. Recommendations will be customized and delivered over video-chat, which can also include screen sharing. SMBs are encouraged to "share their goals" prior to speaking with an advisor. The advisors themselves are internal Google personnel.

Google says that SMBs can expect discussion of two products per appointment. That raises the question of multiple sessions. I asked Google if they were planning discounted bundles for people who needed more than just one session. "There are no upcoming plans for a price bundle or subscription, but it's something we might explore in the future," a Google spokesperson said.

Why we care. Google local support has historically been criticized for uneven quality. This program represents a significant potential improvement for SMBs, who are often given inaccurate or self-serving marketing information by third parties seeking to sell them products. Yet the value of the program will ultimately depend on the quality of the advisors themselves and their level of expertise. It will sink or swim on that basis.

Google is often “shy” about promoting its products and services. I suspect, however, if the company does market this it will see significant demand from local business owners who are hungry for help and objective information.

About The Author



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