

AI Client Work That Pays: Selling Done-For-You AI Services to Local Businesses

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Chapter 1: Pick One Service You Can Deliver in Under Five Hours

Most people who try to sell AI services to local businesses fail before they ever talk to a customer. Not because the market isn't there — it is — but because they show up offering "AI consulting," "automation solutions," or "AI-powered growth." Those are not services. They're categories. A plumbing company owner who has forty-five seconds to decide whether you're worth listening to cannot buy a category. They can buy a thing.

This chapter is about picking that thing. One thing. A single service, narrowly defined, that you can personally deliver from start to finish in under five hours of actual working time. Then you sell it over and over until you're sick of it, and only then do you consider adding a second.

I know that sounds limiting. It's supposed to. The limit is the whole point.

Why Five Hours Is the Right Ceiling

The five-hour number isn't arbitrary, and it isn't about being lazy. It's about arithmetic and about risk.

Start with the arithmetic. Suppose you charge \$750 for a service that takes you five hours. That's \$150/hour of delivery time. But delivery time is never the whole job. For every hour you spend delivering, you'll spend roughly another hour on sales, revisions, emails, invoicing, and the client asking you a question on a Tuesday afternoon. So your real effective rate is closer to \$75/hour. That's a decent freelance rate — not spectacular, but real money that compounds.

Now suppose you charge \$750 for something that takes twenty hours. Your effective rate drops to under \$20/hour, and you've built a business that pays worse than a warehouse shift while carrying all the risk of self-employment. The fix isn't to charge \$3,000 for the twenty-hour job — a local business with eleven employees very often won't pay \$3,000 for anything from a stranger. The fix is to sell the five-hour job.

Then there's risk. Here's the ugly reality of AI service work in 2026: **the tools break, the outputs are sometimes wrong, and clients change their minds.** A five-hour scope means a disaster costs you five hours. A forty-hour scope means a disaster costs you a week you'll never get back, and you'll probably deliver it anyway at a loss because you're too embarrassed to walk away. I have watched people take on "let's rebuild your entire customer service system with AI" as their first project and quietly stop returning the client's calls three months later. Don't be that person. Five hours is a scope you can eat if it goes sideways.

Finally: five hours is the largest scope you can honestly quote before you've done the work twenty times. You do not yet know how long things take. Nobody does at the start. Your estimates will be wrong by a factor of two or three in your first ten jobs. A five-hour job that balloons to twelve is annoying. A twenty-hour job that balloons to sixty is a catastrophe.

The Four Tests a Service Must Pass

Before you commit to a service, run it through four tests. If it fails any one of them, pick something else. This is not a scoring rubric where three out of four is good enough. All four, or move on.

Test 1: Can you describe the deliverable in one sentence, using a noun?

Not "I'll improve your online presence." That's a verb phrase with no object. Try: "You get a 12-page FAQ section written for your website, formatted and ready to paste in, covering the questions your customers actually ask." That's a noun — a thing that exists at the end. The client can picture it. They can tell whether they got it.

Services that fail this test: strategy, optimization, consulting, training (unless you define the artifact — a recorded video plus a written SOP is a noun; "training your staff" is not), and anything with the word "solutions" in it.

Test 2: Can you show a finished example before you're hired?

This is the single most powerful thing in local services sales and almost nobody does it. If your service is "60 social posts for a dental practice," you should be able to build a complete, real sample for a real dental practice — one you found on Google Maps,

that you have no relationship with — and put it in front of a prospect. Not a template. Not a mockup. The actual thing.

If you cannot build a sample without the client's cooperation, the service is too dependent on their inputs, which means the project will stall the moment they get busy. And they will get busy. Local business owners are the busiest people you will ever try to sell to.

Test 3: Does it survive the client doing nothing?

Think hard about this one. Ask: after I hand this over, what does the client have to do for it to be worth what they paid?

If the answer is "post it consistently for six months," "follow the strategy," or "have their staff use the new process," you have a service whose value depends entirely on client behavior you cannot control. When it doesn't work, you get blamed. The best beginner services deliver value at the moment of handoff, or require one small, obvious action (paste this in, upload this file, click connect).

Test 4: Can you tell honestly whether you did a good job?

You need an internal standard you can check against before you send the invoice. "Every FAQ answer is factually correct about this business, matches their actual pricing page, and doesn't invent services they don't offer" is checkable. "The content is engaging" is not.

This matters more with AI work than any other kind of freelance work, because the failure mode of AI output is *plausible wrongness*. It reads well and it's false. If you can't check it, you will ship errors, and one confidently wrong claim about a client's pricing or licensing can cost them a customer and cost you the relationship.

Seven Services That Actually Pass All Four Tests

Here are seven concrete services. I've included what the deliverable is, roughly how long it takes once you have a repeatable process, and — importantly — what goes wrong. Prices are what I'd consider realistic ranges for a small local business in a mid-size US market in 2026. They're estimates based on typical local-services pricing, not

survey data, and your market will differ. A dental practice in San Francisco and a landscaping company in rural Ohio will not pay the same number.

1. The Customer Question Pack (FAQ + objection responses)

- **Deliverable:** 20–30 questions with written answers, delivered as (a) a formatted HTML block or Google Doc for their website, and (b) a plain-text version their staff can copy into email and text replies.
- **Time once dialed in:** 3–4 hours.
- **Realistic price:** \$400–\$900.
- **Why it sells:** Every local business answers the same fifteen questions by phone forty times a week. They know it. You're selling them their own time back.
- **What goes wrong:** You invent details. The model will happily write "We offer a 10-year warranty" because that's what similar businesses say. If it's not on their site, in their emails, or confirmed by them, it does not go in. Every factual claim needs a source you can point to.

2. The Review Response System

- **Deliverable:** A set of 15–20 response templates for Google reviews — 5-star, 4-star, 3-star, and detailed 1–2-star responses covering the four or five complaints this specific business actually receives — plus a one-page written process for who responds and how fast. Optionally, you write responses to their entire backlog of unanswered reviews.
- **Time:** 2–4 hours (add an hour if you're clearing a big backlog).
- **Realistic price:** \$350–\$800 one-time; \$150–\$400/month if you take over ongoing responses.
- **Why it sells:** Unanswered negative reviews are a visible, embarrassing wound. Owners feel it personally. And Google has publicly encouraged businesses to respond to reviews as part of managing their Business Profile — it's a legitimate, non-hypey reason to do the work.
- **What goes wrong:** Templated responses that all sound identical are worse than no response. Google review responses are public and permanent. And

never, ever have AI write a response that disputes a customer's version of events — that's a legal and PR minefield. Responses acknowledge, offer to talk offline, and stop.

3. The Google Business Profile Rebuild

- **Deliverable:** A completed audit of their Google Business Profile against every available field, plus written copy for the business description, all services/products entries, attributes, and 10 pre-written Posts they can schedule. Delivered as a checklist showing before/after.
- **Time:** 3–5 hours.
- **Realistic price:** \$500–\$1,200.
- **Why it sells:** For most local service businesses, the Google Business Profile drives more calls than their website. Half of them have a two-sentence description written in 2019 and three of eighteen possible service entries filled in.
- **What goes wrong:** Google's guidelines on Business Profiles change and are enforced unevenly. Keyword-stuffing the business name is against Google's rules and can get a profile suspended — do not do it, no matter what a client asks. Also: you need owner access to the profile, which means a real conversation about permissions before you start.

4. The Local Service Page Set

- **Deliverable:** 4–6 written web pages, one per service or per service-area, 700–1,100 words each, with headings, an FAQ block, and a clear call to action. Delivered as formatted HTML or straight into their CMS if they give you access.
- **Time:** 4–5 hours for a set of five, once you have a research process.
- **Realistic price:** \$800–\$2,000 for the set.
- **Why it sells:** Businesses that offer six services often have one page listing all six. Separate pages are a standard, boring, decades-old SEO practice that still works, and now you can produce them fast.

- **What goes wrong:** Near-duplicate pages. If you generate "Plumbing in Springfield," "Plumbing in Riverdale," and "Plumbing in Oak Hill" and the only difference is the city name, you've built the thin doorway-page pattern that search engines have penalized for over a decade. Each page needs genuinely distinct substance or don't make it. This is the service where AI most tempts you into producing garbage at volume.

5. The Quote/Estimate Follow-Up Sequence

- **Deliverable:** A 5–7 message email and SMS sequence that fires after a business sends a quote, written specifically for their service and price point, plus setup inside whatever tool they already use (Jobber, Housecall Pro, ServiceTitan, Mailchimp, or their CRM).
- **Time:** 3–5 hours including setup.
- **Realistic price:** \$700–\$1,800.
- **Why it sells:** This is the one that most directly and provably touches revenue. Contractors send quotes and then never follow up. Every un-followed-up quote is a job someone else got.
- **What goes wrong:** SMS is regulated. In the US, text marketing falls under the TCPA and carrier registration requirements (A2P 10DLC), and rules around consent are real with real penalties. Do not set up SMS blasts to a list of people who never opted in. Transactional follow-up to someone who just requested a quote is a different animal from marketing texts, but the line matters. **This is legal territory — tell the client to confirm their compliance approach with a qualified attorney, and put that in writing.**

6. The Internal SOP Pack

- **Deliverable:** 5–8 written standard operating procedures for the business's repeated internal tasks — how to onboard a new tech, how to handle a warranty call, the closing checklist — produced from a 45-minute recorded interview with the owner or manager, then edited and formatted.
- **Time:** 4–5 hours including the interview.

- **Realistic price:** \$600–\$1,500.
- **Why it sells:** Every owner of a 5–40 person business knows their processes live in one or two people's heads and it terrifies them. Transcription plus AI drafting turns a task they've procrastinated for three years into a week.
- **What goes wrong:** The AI smooths over the parts the owner said vaguely, producing an SOP that sounds authoritative but describes a process nobody actually follows. Every SOP has to go back to the person who does the job for correction. Build that review round into your scope.

7. The Inbox Triage Setup

- **Deliverable:** A working setup in their existing email that automatically labels/sorts incoming mail into categories (new lead, existing customer, vendor, junk) and drafts a first-pass reply for the lead category, plus a one-page written guide and a short screen recording showing how it works.
- **Time:** 3–5 hours.
- **Realistic price:** \$600–\$1,500 setup.
- **Why it sells:** Owners drown in email. This one produces a visible "oh, that's cool" moment in a demo, which matters.
- **What goes wrong:** This is the most technically fragile service on the list. You're touching their actual email, which means access, permissions, and the possibility of an automation misfiring on a real customer. Never let an automation send anything without a human clicking send — draft only. And be extremely careful about what data flows to which vendor; if they're in healthcare, legal, or financial services, there are compliance rules and you should not touch their inbox without their compliance person signing off.

How to Choose Between Them

Don't pick the one that sounds most impressive. Pick using this order of priority:

1. **Which industry do you already have a way into?** If your brother-in-law owns an HVAC company, or you spent six years in restaurants, or your

kid's baseball team is sponsored by a roofing company — that's worth more than any other factor. Warm access beats service selection by a wide margin.

2. **Which one can you build a real sample for this week?** If the answer is "none of them," you've chosen wrong.
3. **Which one can you check for correctness?** Pick the one where you'd catch your own mistakes.
4. **Which one has the fewest dependencies on client access?** Services needing admin access to their systems have a longer, more fragile sales cycle. For your first ten sales, prefer the ones where you can deliver a file.

Notice what's not on that list: which one is most "AI." Nobody buys AI. They buy the FAQ page, the reviews handled, the quotes followed up. The AI is how you make it economical for you to deliver it at that price. It's your cost structure, not their benefit.

Narrowing to a Niche (and Why It Doubles Your Price)

"FAQ writing for local businesses" is a service. "FAQ writing for orthodontic practices" is a business.

When you niche down, four things happen at once, and all of them help you:

- **Your research time collapses.** The fifth orthodontist you write FAQs for takes you 40% of the time the first one did, because you already know what patients ask about Invisalign versus brackets, about payment plans, about what happens when a wire pokes.
- **Your samples get sharper.** A prospect looking at work you did for a business exactly like theirs is doing zero translation. They see themselves.
- **Referrals actually work.** Local business owners talk to each other within their industry — at association meetings, in Facebook groups, at trade shows. A generalist gets no word-of-mouth because nobody knows how to describe them.
- **You can charge more.** Specificity reads as expertise. It also genuinely is expertise after a few jobs.