

Google Maps is removing fake businesses, but you should still know how to spot them

While Google is cracking down on fake Google Maps listings, it's important to know how to spot these scams yourself.

Dating app users aren't the only ones who face "scams." Sadly, it's easy to fall for online scams. While Google is cracking down on fake Google Maps listings, it's important to know how to spot these scams yourself.

Google is suing scammers behind fake Maps listings

This week, CBS News reported that Google has filed a lawsuit against a fraud network behind tens of thousands of fraudulent listings on its Maps app. The company launched an investigation after a locksmith in Texas reported that another business was impersonating them on Google Maps and scamming their customers.

The crime led Google to discover more than 10,000 other illegal Maps listings, which the company has since shut down. These listings range from hijacked accounts to outright fake operations.

While it's certainly a relief to know that the app has been cleaned up, the sad reality is that scammers will continue their tricks. The fact that thousands of fraudulent entities can appear right under Google's nose is a reminder to always be vigilant when ordering services online.

How to Spot Fake Businesses on Google Maps

There aren't always clear signs of a fake business on Google Maps, but there are some factors to consider when hiring a service through the app. While one sign in one category isn't necessarily a deal breaker, signs in multiple categories are suspicious.

Service Type

The report sparked Google's latest crusade. It's a prime example of a common scam. CBS News reports that services you need quickly in stressful or urgent situations are where Google finds most of the fraudulent activity.

Some examples of these types of services are:

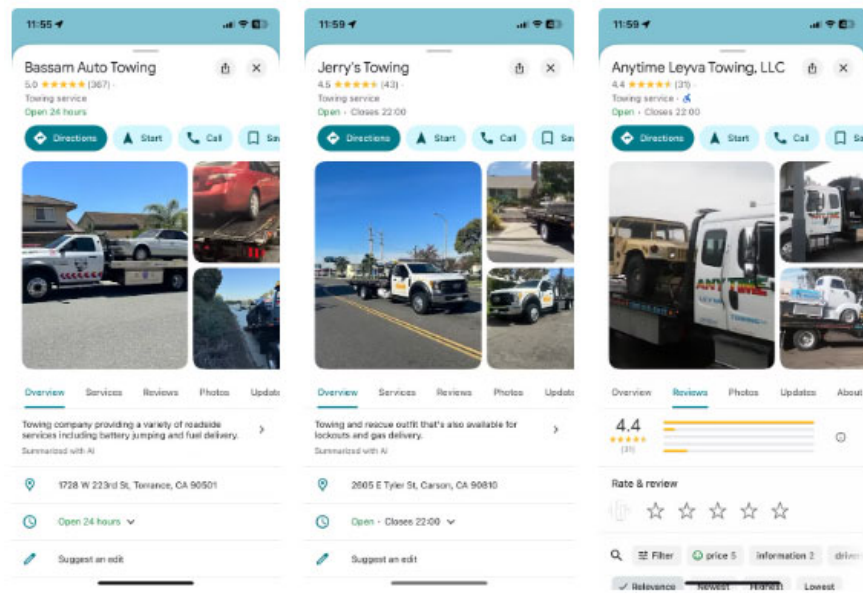
1. Locksmith

2. Towing
3. Emergency Repair

There are many honest businesses in these areas; it is important to exercise caution when hiring in these sensitive industries.

Business website

A business will usually list its website in its Google Maps profile under **Overview**. If you don't see it, check the **About** tab. If a website is provided, make sure it matches the business name. You can also look for spelling errors in the URL and check to see if the website is active.



However, some legitimate businesses won't have a website; instead, they may rely on word of mouth, including reviews on Google or Yelp.

Evaluate

Reviews are another way to rate a new service. Unfortunately, fake reviews are common, so a business with a 5-star rating may not be legitimate. Similar to fake Amazon reviews, some signs of fake Google Maps reviews include:

1. Extremely positive but vague reviews, no specific information.
2. All or many reviews of a business are posted within a very short period of time.
3. Reviewers are either generically named or referred to as "Anonymous".
4. Most of the reviews are just stars with no comments.

These characteristics alone may not necessarily signal a scam, but when combined with other factors, it's a different story.

Tip : Cross-check your Google reviews with another source, like Yelp.

Payment method

One of the oldest scams is asking for money up front. If you've contacted a service that asks you to pay up front, you should at least check for these other warning signs before proceeding. Another suspicious move is if a business asks for unconventional payment, such as a wire transfer or gift card.

Mobile payment services like Zelle or PayPal aren't necessarily suspicious. Many legitimate vendors are businesses that use these apps.

Meanwhile, Google is doing everything it can to restore trust in its Maps ecosystem. The company recently recovered from a spate of malicious ads in its search results. According to a spokesperson who spoke to CBS News, Google has partnered with cybercrime support network ScamSpotter.org, which regularly updates its site with the latest scams to keep people on their toes.

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