SERPIFAI FIELD GUIDE - WORKED APPLICATION

Competitor Selection for a Local Service Business

A beginner-friendly evidence guide for deciding which visible local businesses are truly comparable, which are discovery or information competitors, and what evidence must change before the role changes.

One-minute rule: A visible local result is a candidate, not automatically a competitor. Direct status requires the same job, same geography, same timing, same buyer and defensible fulfilment.

Human explanation: Think of the map as a waiting room. Everyone on the screen has entered the room, but only some can actually take the same call. The evidence packet asks: "Can you do this exact job, here, tonight, for this buyer - and who actually turns up?"

The worked case in one view

Scenario boundaries | Evidence packet | Conflicting evidence | Inclusion / exclusion | Decision changed | Controlled action | Unresolved / reopen

Fictional scenario: one local plumbing dispatch base, a target postcode, a homeowner, and an urgent burst-pipe response tonight. Six visible candidates are qualified into one direct provider, one conditional provider, one indirect provider, two reference roles and one direct exclusion.

Fictional composite. No client data, measured ranking, lead, revenue or market-share result.

Define the decision before defining competitors

Boundary	Worked condition	Why it matters
Buyer	Residential homeowner who can authorise the callout.	Other buyers may use different criteria.
Job	Emergency burst-pipe diagnosis and repair.	Adjacent services are not automatically substitutes.
Geography	Target postcode inside the operating area.	City visibility does not prove postcode serviceability.
Timing	Tonight / emergency window.	Tomorrow is not the same decision moment.
Fulfilment	Own team or verified local operator.	Directories and publishers can influence without performing the job.
Objective	Decide what may be benchmarked for the emergency offer.	The set exists to permit or refuse specific comparisons.

Boundary test: if changing the buyer, job, geography or timing changes who can win the decision, define that condition before competitor selection.

Fast field questions

- What exact job is being purchased?
- Who authorises it?
- Where must it be fulfilled?
- When must the service be available?
- What evidence proves who actually fulfils it?

02 - EVIDENCE PACKET

Separate observations from what they are allowed to prove

Evidence	May support	Does not prove
Map / Business Profile	Candidate discovery and stated local details.	Capacity, market share or substitution.
Service-area / local service page	Declared geography, scope and booking proposition.	Availability at every decision moment.
Local Services Ads	Paid local visibility and candidate discovery.	Operational equivalence.
Directory / marketplace	Lead-routing pressure and comparison UX.	That the platform performs the service.
Reviews	Experience themes and contradictions to investigate.	Current capacity, revenue or serviceability.
First-party call / quote	Observed buyer/provider behaviour for the scope.	A universal market conclusion.

Fail-closed rule: each candidate claim must point to an existing evidence record owned by that candidate. Missing, stale, unsupported or mismatched evidence cannot quietly produce READY.

Identity
Evidence ID, candidate ID, source type, source locator.

Time
Observation date, freshness, reopen trigger.

Interpretation
Observed / inferred / unresolved plus limits.

Ownership
Reviewer responsible for refresh or resolution.

Do not average contradictions away

Conflict	Observed disagreement	Controlled response
Hours	Map says 24 hours; branch page offers next-day booking.	Emergency timing remains unresolved.
Geography	Reviews mention wider jobs; current page excludes target postcode.	Current declared boundary controls until fulfilment is verified.
Identity	Marketplace looks provider-like; terms route work to third parties.	Intermediary unless direct fulfilment is proven.
Type / fulfilment	Publisher or directory input conflicts with own-team fulfilment.	Return evidence contradiction before role assignment.
First-party	Search visibility and call/quote evidence point to different roles.	Preserve both and investigate.

> **Governance rule:** unsupported control tokens, ghost IDs or unknown conflict statuses are invalid evidence states. They do not count as resolved.

Smallest-evidence principle

Do not collect everything. Collect the smallest current observation that can change the decision permission: hours, postcode coverage, fulfilment ownership, local operator identity, or first-party buyer evidence.

Move from visible set to permitted roles

Candidate	Governed role	Reason	Permitted influence
A - local emergency plumber	**Direct**	Same job, postcode, timing, buyer and own-team fulfilment.	Like-for-like offer, booking path, trust and service-area communication.
B - franchise operator	**Conditional**	Emergency availability unclear.	Only supported dimensions.
C - lead marketplace	**Intermediary**	Routes buyers to third parties.	Lead capture, comparison UX, routing and discovery.
D - national brand page	**Out of direct scope**	No verified target-postcode operator.	Brand/search messaging only.
E - DIY publisher	**Information reference**	Competes for problem-solving attention, not fulfilment.	Explanation, evidence, safety and handoff.
F - drain specialist	**Indirect**	Different scoped service.	Substitution, objections and adjacent needs.

Decision changed: before qualification, six pins can look like six competitors. After qualification, the output is a permission map: who may influence offer work, lead-routing UX, information coverage, adjacent positioning, or nothing direct at all.

06 - CONTROLLED ACTION

Each role permits a different next move

Role	Controlled action	Query / entity lens	Proof
Direct	Compare scoped offer, service-area clarity, contact path and trust evidence.	service + location/postcode + timing; provider to service area to booking.	Current serviceability plus first-party evidence where available.
Conditional	Collect only evidence that settles the unresolved boundary.	Do not expand as if direct status were proven.	Fresh hours, coverage, ownership or fulfilment.
Intermediary	Analyze lead capture, comparison UX and routing.	compare providers / get quotes; marketplace to enquiry to routed provider.	Current terms and routing model.
Information reference	Analyze explanation, evidence and decision support.	problem-solving intent; problem to risk to provider handoff.	Current content/source evidence.
Indirect	Study substitution, objections and adjacent needs.	alternative service / different timing.	Evidence of switching or scope change.

Action binding: a controlled action must reference a real candidate and the real decision for that same candidate. HANDOFF can be READY TO SHARE only when its smallest next action is backed by a governed READY action.

Human-first search guardrail: keyword variants are research clues, not reasons to manufacture extra pages. Consolidate overlapping intent unless a distinct user decision genuinely needs a separate canonical owner.

Good analysis keeps unknowns visible

B - franchise operator
Emergency timing and local availability remain unresolved.

D - national brand
Target-postcode local operator / serviceability remains unverified.

Reopen when

- service area changes;
- hours or emergency availability change;
- fulfilment or ownership changes;
- branch/operator coverage changes;
- first-party buyer evidence materially contradicts the current role;
- the scoped buyer, job, geography or timing changes.

Portable handoff

> For this scoped emergency-plumbing decision, A is the direct benchmark; B remains conditional; C and E are reference roles; F is indirect; D is excluded from direct comparison. Refresh B's local availability and verify D's target-postcode operator. Do not infer capacity, market share or direct competition from visibility or review volume alone.

REVIEW CHECKLIST AND SOURCES

What another reviewer should be able to reproduce

- State buyer, job, geography and timing.
- Trace each candidate to a real evidence ID.
- Explain what each evidence record may prove.
- Show unresolved contradictions.
- Explain inclusion/exclusion and how the decision changed.
- Link the next action to the correct candidate and decision.
- Record owner, prohibited inference and reopen trigger.

Workbook strategy layer

The optional Strategy Map translates already-governed roles into buyer pain/JTBD, query themes, entities, strategic value and proof. It does not create a second score or override readiness.

Primary methodological sources

Google local ranking: https://support.google.com/business/answer/7091?hl=en

Google service areas: https://support.google.com/business/answer/9157481?hl=en

Google representation guidelines: https://support.google.com/business/answer/3038177?hl=en

Google Local Services service areas/job types: https://support.google.com/localservices/answer/12491364?hl=en

Google Local Services ad rankings: https://support.google.com/localservices/answer/7527305?hl=en

FTC reviews rule Q&A: https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/consumer-reviews-testimonials-rule-questions-answers

US DOJ market definition: https://www.justice.gov/atr/merger-guidelines/tools/market-definition

Google sources explain visibility, service-area and Local Services mechanics, not SERPIFAI's competitor taxonomy. FTC material governs review practices, not capacity. DOJ material is a boundary/substitution analogy only; this is not legal or antitrust analysis.