

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



MARKETING

GUIDES

For Small Businesses

LOCAL SEO



**Proven Strategies & Tips for
Better Local Google Rankings**





Marketing Guides for Small Businesses: Local SEO

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Introduction

Ready to get your business phone ringing and door swinging? If you're a small business owner who depends on a steady stream of new customers, your attention likely perks right up at the prospect of getting more people into your business.

Guess what the ticket is... **Local SEO.**

Now, you've probably already formed an opinion of local SEO or search engine optimization, and it may not be a good one. In fact, it would be a safe bet to assume your business gets contacted multiple times each week by some firm somewhere promising to propel your small business website straight to the top of Google. So just the mention of this marketing tactic may send your eyes rolling.

Here's the thing...even when people plan on shopping locally, they still look to Google to find out who is most convenient, who's got the best prices, and whose business is popular with all the other local customers. The problem for a lot of small business owners is that the whole local SEO process seems to be veiled in complication and confusion, putting it perpetually on the back burner if it's on the stove at all.

But your business can't afford to miss out! Local SEO is how you put your small business on the map (literally) – and it's the best way to make sure your ideal prospects, the ones who are near enough to become your loyal customers, discover you. It's also one of the most cost-effective ways small businesses can compete with bigger competitors.

By now, chances are good that you've got a website (even if it's not one you love). Unfortunately, just having a website is not enough to grow your business. You've got to make sure that it's showing up where your next customers are looking.

It's time to learn about search engines and your online presence, even if your business is in a rock-solid, brick and mortar building, with no online sales. There are still plenty of ways you can use the Internet to grow your business.

Your ideal customer may be searching right now for the products and services you sell. This new customer has at least two options – you, and your competitor. There's a lot you can do to distinguish your business from your competitors. That differentiation begins with developing a sound marketing strategy, and part of that strategy involves a plan for optimizing your website to attract local customers.

In this quick guide, you'll learn how to use local SEO to increase the likelihood that new customers find and choose your business. There are a lot of things about local SEO marketing that really aren't that difficult and once you see your business climbing the



search engine rankings, you might even start to enjoy this part of your business. Don't say we didn't warn you!

What is Local SEO?

Local SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is a procedure for optimizing your website to help it display more prominently in the local search results pages on Google and the other major search engines. If your company has a local address and must draw customers to that address, then an effective local SEO strategy is absolutely vital to the future of your business.

If you own and operate a business without a local SEO plan, don't expect to be popping up on the first page of Google for prime keywords. Without taking action, your business will only continue to be lost in the shuffle of back pages. With the increasing trend of localized search results, combined with everyone searching before they buy, your lack of online visibility will eventually lead to a serious business meltdown.

Think about it. There are more than **3.5 billion Google searches every day**. Your business growth depends on reaching them when they're searching online because that is where all the action is. As a local business, you must optimize for local search to stay in the game.

Before we dive into how you can use Local SEO to grow your business, there's some housekeeping to do on your website.

Local SEO and Your Website

Local SEO happens in two places: on-site (on your website) and off-site (everywhere else on the Internet). You may also hear this referred to as **on-page SEO** and **off-page SEO**. Once you've got your on-site situation squared away, it will be a lot easier to handle the off-site tasks. Without proper on-site SEO, your website will never be able to reach its local ranking potential. Once you get it right, your site will actually be working for you instead of just wallowing in the search engine abyss.

The heart of SEO is knowing how to choose and use the right keywords. What is a keyword? It is the word or phrase people key into a search engine like Google when they want to search for something. Occasionally, when more than one word is used it is called a key phrase. But whether it's a phrase or a word, it's usually referred to as a keyword.

Keywords form the basis for all Search Engine Optimization strategies so before you ramp up your SEO program you must know which keywords your prospective customers are using when searching for your products and services. As it turns out,



there are some free tools you can use to help develop a list of probable keywords. The most popular is Google's Keyword Planner:

<https://adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner>

Just type in a word or phrase that you think people might use when they search for you. The tool will kick out a list of associated keywords with information about the number of searches done for each keyword per month. It also indicates the competitiveness of each keyword. This is really useful information, because if the volume, suggested price per click and competition level is high, you know that those keywords correlate to more sales, and thus those are the terms and phrases you should focus on. Proper keyword research takes the guesswork out of SEO.

After you've finished your keyword research you should have scores of potential keywords that might be used by searchers looking for what your company provides. Think about all the possible terms people might use to search for what you do. Once you start adding in these combinations of variables the list explodes.

Your Keywords, Your Website

When you look at your website, examine it closely, page by page. Choose one to two keywords per page, and optimize that page for that keyword(s). As you write the content for that page, be sure to include your keyword in a few different places on the page, including the page title, the meta tag or description, the URL structure, Image ALT tags and title tags, as well as any anchor links. You can also incorporate your keyword into geo-targeted phrases on any web page or blog posts you feature on your site.

Make sure you don't just stick your keywords anywhere simply to help your SEO efforts. You should only insert them where they fit naturally, add to the content flow, and make editorial sense. Google doesn't like the practice of "keyword stuffing," so focus on creating readable, quality content with natural keyword placement.

In addition to high quality content, it's also important to make sure every page on your website has "enough" text to gain the respect of the search engines as a legitimate, valuable page. Part of what determines how a search engine views your pages' value involves how long visitors stay on those pages. If you've got just a little bit of text, they'll read it in seconds and click elsewhere.

Does Your Business Need a NAP?

Every industry has its acronyms. For Local SEO, one you're likely to hear a lot is NAP. It stands for Name, Address, and Phone number. NAP plays a surprisingly important role in getting your business listing onto the map of local search results.



These simple bits of information can do wonders for your local marketing efforts if you handle them correctly – and tank you if you don't. It is critically important that the NAP be accurate and consistent not only throughout your website, but also anywhere it appears throughout the entire Internet. Why? Because the big search engines use NAP data when figuring out which companies to display in area-targeted searches. If your NAP is inconsistent across the Internet, it will hurt your local SEO efforts.

NAP placement is another important consideration. It's important that your NAP appears in any and all legitimate directories, especially local and industry related directories. To boost your listings, incorporate high-value data such as logo, photos, videos and call-to actions.

Have Enough Citations?

Another primary goal of being listed in directories, in addition to live traffic seeing your listing, is to build citations. A citation is a reference online to your NAP – your company name, address, and phone number, as well as your website URL. The big search engines consider your company's citations when they evaluate the online legitimacy and popularity of your business. The more citations you have, the higher your ranking and heightened value for your local SEO efforts.

Don't forget to keep citation quality in mind. Not all citations are created equal. Is the source of the citation a reputable, honorable source? After all, the quality of the citation is a huge local SEO ranking factor. It can sometimes be difficult to determine which citation sources are helpful and which are the other kind. You might want to consider getting professional help with your local SEO citation ranking efforts.

What Are Your Customers Saying About You?

Customer reviews are one of the top ranking factors for local SEO, and for turning searchers into customers. Once people have found you in the search results pages, the absolute number one factor that gets them to click on your website and continue along the path to becoming a new client is your review record.

Key points to keep in mind about online reviews:

- They strongly affect how companies are ranked in Google's local search results.
- They strongly affect which search results websites get clicked by the searcher.
- They strongly affect customers' decisions about buying.

Positive online customer reviews offer strong social proof that your company is dependable and provides quality, trustworthy goods and services. Good reviews make it so customers are going to beat your front door down to do business with you.



Any positive online review is a good thing; however, only the reviews left in certain places affect how you rank with Google's local search results. Reviews on your Google+ Local page are the most important, because Google thinks they can be trusted more than reviews left elsewhere on the web. And the Google+ reviews are the ones most searchers will see, because they're linked to the search results pages.

How to Get Reviews

How you get your reviews matters. If you go about getting them in ways that go against Google's best practices, you'll do more harm than good. If you try to buy positive reviews, you put yourself at risk for major trouble.

There are few safe ways to get reviews from your customers. For starters, simply ask new and existing customers when they're in your business, make some phone calls, or send an email; or create a "Review Us" link on an obvious place on your website. Other good practices include displaying banners and signs with a review URL at your place of business and putting the review URL on your sales receipts, business cards, and any other business documents.

Never under any circumstances offer an incentive for a positive review. Google says you can ask people for reviews, but you are not permitted to pay or otherwise compensate someone for a review. You also have to be careful how you ask for reviews, as many forms of solicitation are prohibited by reviews sites.

Getting good reviews can involve lots of moving parts, but it's critical to the health of your business that you get them. It's especially important that the first few reviews are good ones, with a fair amount of text, as they will lead the ones that follow. You might decide this whole process is important enough to leave up to a local SEO professional to handle.

Google My Business

Google My Business (GMB) is a web page that Google provides for local businesses. It allows you to put your company info on Google +, Google Maps, Google Search and other Google features. Small businesses are encouraged to claim and optimize the listing potential of GMB. They can access their applications all in one location, and no longer need to make duplicate entries. They simply enter their information once and it will populate all Google products and services.

The idea is to bring together all the services Google offers to small businesses. In fact it's geared for local businesses, especially those small businesses that have yet to fully utilize all of the Google products and services that are available to them. In addition, Google My Business is now the default for current Google+ and Places and users. These and other Google My Business features allows the small business owner the ability to interact with their customers in new and unique ways, which ultimately gets reflected in their local search rankings.



Are You Using Social Signals?

Social signals are the shares, likes, votes, views, pins, etc. that people use on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media sites that are picked up by Google and the other big search engines.

When Google sees that your company is putting content out on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, and that people are following and sharing that content, it has a huge impact on how they rank your business. Why? Because search engines view people's positive social signals as trusted and convincing endorsements that say something positive about your company.

These days, social signals mean more than just having a Facebook page. Now it's all about the activity and interaction – from likes and comments on Facebook to the number of your tweets your Twitter followers share.

There is a definite connection between social shares and search results page rankings. The more content is liked, posted, shared, and re-tweeted, the higher its value. The takeaway here is that if your content is drawing people to your website from Twitter, Facebook, etc. then search engines will begin to see that your content has value and will gradually raise your rankings.

Fresh Content Puts Your Business in the Limelight

Making sure your website has a steady flow of fresh content is one of the best ways to boost your site's ranking on local search results pages. Why? It's not surprising that search engines favor websites that have a continual flow of fresh content. The thinking is that by adding new content you are drawing in new visitors. The more often you add content, the more new visitors you draw. The more new visitors, the more value the search engines place on your website and the better your ranking.

Google and the other big search engines understand that their users want to see content that is current, appropriate, and helpful. Websites that are updated regularly are far more likely to have relevant content than older sites. Simply put, using fresh content on your website will help it gain better ranking on search engine results pages. Search engines crawl websites more often as the content is updated or changed.

Where can you incorporate new, fresh content? A great place to start is through creating new web pages when appropriate. If you discover gaps in the content on your pages or have new products or services, or new twists on existing products or services, then by all means, create new webpages to reflect this.

Other effective ways to boost content include blogs, guest blogs, community activities posts, eBooks, SlideShare, online quizzes, and geo-tagging.



What Can You Do Next?

You might be feeling slightly overwhelmed as you consider all the elements involved in creating Local SEO for your website. Remember your Local SEO program does not need to be perfect, but it does need to be better than what your competitors are doing.

To avoid becoming overwhelmed – and still make steady progress – you may want to approach your Local SEO strategy as a long-term project. It's not a set of tasks that can be done just once, or done overnight. It's an ongoing project that will require patience and diligence as you work on it bit by bit. They don't call it "organic SEO" for nothing – search engines know what natural progress is versus gaming the system too hard or all at once.

If you follow just these basics, and do them effectively and consistently, we're sure that within a matter of months you'll be coming out ahead of your competition in local search results.

Trying to stay on top of all this is a difficult task for most small business owners. You've got your hands full running the day-to-day operations of your business. While it's important to have at least a rudimentary understanding of Local SEO, learning enough to actually do it is a time-consuming and never-ending task.

So, while you could try to handle all the tasks involved in boosting your local online presence in-house, it may not be the best use of your time. You might find that it makes more sense to outsource this task to a Local SEO consultant instead. Be sure to look for one who specializes in Local SEO, not just SEO. After all, you want to ensure the new prospects who visit your website are actually geographically close enough to become your customers.

We hope this guide to Local SEO has helped you understand more about what you need to do to help your local business compete for and win a steady stream of new customers.