

How To Increase Awareness And Generate Leads With Local SEO



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Introduction

Your business has powerful partners that are working hard to help you increase brand awareness and generate new leads. Are you taking advantage of Google, Yahoo and Bing's new focus on Local SEO?

What is Local vs. Conventional Search?

Local search queries differ from conventional searches in that you are adding a “where” component such as an address, a city or a zip code to the “what” component (keyword, product, service etc) that you are looking for. For years, these searches have often been dominated by national competitors: large directory sites with thousands of pages and other non-local SEO powerhouses. Now, the game has changed and search engines want to feature your local business, your products and your services.



Those companies without a local presence are finding it harder and harder to compete for these valuable search queries – searches that are increasingly being performed from smart phones and other mobile devices by consumers who are immediately looking to make a purchase.

Why the focus on Local SEO?

Consumers have always been in the need for local products and services. What's changed is their behavior and the tools they use to perform local searches. Traditionally, local directories like the yellow pages along with newspapers and local magazines supplied this information but the digital age has changed all that. Computers and search engines have replaced the yellow pages and increasingly smart phones and other mobile devices are your computer. When was the last time you picked up a copy of the yellow pages to order food, look for a local service or product?

What's currently happening online is that many sites are battling the search engines for your local attention. While Google is still dominant (and has been since rolling out Google maps in 2004) the landscape has changed: in addition to Yahoo! and Bing, many new local options like FourSquare, Yelp, Merchant Circle and Urban Spoon are giving consumers what they want – reviews and feedback on local merchants and their services or products.

All of this focus on local search means that now is the perfect time to roll out a local SEO strategy and grow your business.

Cost a Concern? Local SEO is Budget Friendly

It is possible to achieve great local search rankings without a large SEO investment – as long as you are willing to invest the time. Local business listings, when optimized, can quickly achieve first page exposure and will out perform expensive, traditional advertising.

Study after study illustrates that organic search traffic converts at a higher rate than most other marketing channels. Consumers are actively seeking you out – this makes search marketing much more effective than traditional “interruption” marketing.

The Great Equalizer

Google's focus on local businesses has resulted in a dramatic change in search results compared to the past. Geo-targeted searches return Google maps listings that level the playing field for small businesses that have one huge edge over national competitors: **a local address.**

Without that all important street address it makes little difference how much money these companies throw at SEO. You can rank well and get in front of potential customers when and where they are shopping. This makes local search one of your most powerful tools for building brand awareness and establishing credibility and authority.

There's an App for That – Local and Mobile

Whether you're an iPhone, Droid or Blackberry user one thing is clear– the user experience on mobile puts everything at your fingertips. Apps that tie into Google maps or other local listings will often eliminate search listings altogether and only pull from these niche listings. Your business details, reviews and driving directions are at your customer's finger tips and the only way you miss out is if you aren't listed locally.



Local Search and Google

Google Local Success Starts with Google Places

Google Places is the #1 place for **local** search marketing on the Web, and it's largely free. Google Places gives your business visibility to potential customers even if you don't have a website. More than likely, you have seen Google Places listings recently when you have searched for services or products in a specific city. People performing these types of searches are HOT buyers and they want to buy locally. Google realized this and has slowly transitioned Google Places into a powerful tool for local search.



Keep in Mind that Google Places is not a Directory

Google Places displays listings as ranked by a mathematical formula (algorithm). So your business may not always appear on the same keyword search or in same order or even in the same category day-to-day. Google states that:

- *"Changes are automated and impartial."*
- *"Having a correct, comprehensive, and up-to-date listing is the most effective way to ensure the best possible ranking."*
- *"Google Maps ranks business listings based on their relevance to the search terms entered, along with geographic distance (where indicated) and other factors. Sometimes our search technology decides that a business that's farther away from your location is more likely to have what you're looking for than a business that's closer."*
- *"Google Maps and Google Places are a free service, so there's no way to request or pay for a better ranking. We also can't provide additional details about our ranking algorithm. We do our best to keep the details of the algorithm confidential in order to make the ranking system as fair as possible for everyone."*

The Evolution of Google Places

In September 2004 Google launched their "Google Local" business listings with maps. "Google Maps", a more extended mapping feature was launched in April 2005 featuring "satellite view" and directions and quickly that was merged together to form "Google Places".

Integration with Organic Search Listings

For many years Google Places listings have dominated local search results and you are probably very familiar with the “7-pack” search results which displayed a local map and the top 7 local businesses corresponding to your keyword query. These results frustrated many companies local SEO efforts because they pushed companies with great organic search rank far down page 1 (best case) and onto the second page (worst case).

Enter the “0-Pack”

November 2010 ushered in a dramatic new look and feel for many local search results, one which integrated the “7 pack” results with their corresponding organic search results.

This new look can now be found in many markets as can the traditional 7-pack results which don’t appear to be phasing out entirely.

What You Need to Know: The Zero-pack emphasizes the importance of optimizing both your Google places listing as well as your organic listing – **local companies with a focus on each seem to have the edge right now.** Here’s a snapshot of this new look:

The screenshot displays a search results page for "Gainesville Florida insurance". On the left, there are organic search results including:

- Travelers.com: "Get A Free Fast Online Quote Now. See How Much You Can Save!"
- Bart Blessing State Farm: "Save on Gainesville insurance with State Farm. Call now! 352-694-9100"
- Gainesville Car Insurance - List of Agents in Gainesville, Florida
- Gainesville Florida Insurance by SSI
- McGriff-Williams | Personal & Business Insurance Gainesville FL
- Darr-Schackow Insurance :: Auto Insurance Gainesville | Homeowners ...
- Gainesville Insurance

On the right, a map shows several location pins labeled A through F, corresponding to the businesses listed in the organic results. Below the map, there are additional search results:

- AutoInsurance.Insure.com
- 21st Century Insurance: "You Could Save Hundreds On Car Ins. Free Auto Insurance Rate Quote. Florida www.21st.com"
- Esurance @ Auto Insurance: "1 (877) 410 1497 People when you need them. Technology when you don't. www.esurance.com"
- Progressive@ Auto Quotes: "Shop Our Official Site for Instant Auto Quotes & Comparisons Today! www.progressive.com"
- Car Insurance - \$19 Month

As you can see, Google's new layout gives businesses significantly more exposure than the 7-pack layout. Plus, the new results take up more real estate which further spotlights the 3-4 optimized listings that rank near the top.

So how do you ensure that top ranking? Let's discuss that now.

Building a Powerful Google Places Listing

Listen to Google. Google provides you with concise directions on how to build your business's places page. Before you begin, there are a few things you should understand that will help ensure that Google Places is having maximum Local SEO impact.

Consistency – Conventional SEO puts a high premium on having the proper keywords in place...for good reason. Google places does give you plenty of opportunity to tell visitors what search terms your business relates to but you also need to ensure that your business information is consistent with the contact information (address, phone, URL etc) found on your primary domain AND any citation sites. Google needs to be able to trust you and when they see consistent business information across multiple sources it helps.

Completion – Complete your Google places listing. So many businesses go half-way and provide the bare minimum but a thorough, complete Google places listing will rank better and provide a stronger user experience. This means photos, videos, coupons – Google allows you to include a lot of information and remember: It's ALL FREE.

Citations – To Google, citations equate to trust in the same way backlinks do. Citations are loosely defined as *a link from an authoritative source or directory, review site or local pages directory*. Citation links help establish trust with Google through the validation of business information. Be sure that all citations accurately represent your business address, phone, URL and other pertinent information (as mentioned above in the category section).

Note: *Be sure and check out our citation source list in the conclusion section*

Here is a quick run down of what an effective Google Places listing entails:

Business Name

- Represent your business in the exact same way that it appears offline.
- Save taglines, phone numbers or URL's for their appropriate place. Inclusion here might appear as an attempt to manipulate results.

Business Location

Location appears to play a key role in the places algorithm. Follow these guidelines carefully:

- Use the exact same street level address that you should have listed in the footer section of your website. Consistency is key.
- Keep in mind that this needs to be a physical address, not a P.O. Box.
- One listing per physical business location – even if you operate in a larger service area. Don't worry - you can designate your service areas separately.
- Do you have multiple specialties in the same office? Create a listing for your offices and a separate listing for each practitioner. According to Google's standards this should not appear manipulative.
- Remember, this is about trust and consistency across many different information sources, if your address is somewhat rural or miles away from a city's "epicenter" zip code you might be tempted to list just the city name.
- Multiple business locations? Create listings for each!

Website and Phone

- Provide a phone number that connects to your individual business location as directly as possible, and provide one website that represents your individual business location.
- Your phone number SHOULD be a local number for maximum impact.
- Also know that you should not select the "verify listing by phone" option if you use an automated phone system. Google's system can only provide your verification PIN to a live person or voice mail.

Categories

Here is where your keywords will come into play.

- Keep in mind that Google Places categories should say what your business IS, not what it does. For example: If you are a law firm that is your category. Not "personal injury attorney."

- Google will provide category suggestions – you can override these and create your own but inclusion of location keywords will appear as an attempt to manipulate the listings.
- Get as specific as you can within categories. Say you have a book store, try to choose a specific category like "college books store, "comic books", "used book store", "new books", or "rare and antique books".
- Also, check and correct listings for your business on citation sites such as YellowPages.com and SuperPages.com because Google aggregates information about your business from other website to determine under what categories and for what keywords your Google Places business listing appears.

Advanced Tips – Reviews

Student Maid - Cleaning Service ☆


Gainesville, FL
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Reviews by Google users


1 - 10 of 31


★★★★★ **My wife thinks I am the BOMB** for hiring Student Maid. She is pregnant with twins and the last thing she wants to do after working all day is clean the house. She LOVES me for hiring Student Maid and because we are both Gator Alum we really appreciate their focus on keeping their employee/students focused on good grades. Great company to work with and week recommend them weekly.

[Edit](#) - [Delete](#)

 **Donna** - Apr 12, 2011
★★★★★ **Great customer service, great team work.** Very hard working, efficient and professional staff. Definatly great quality service from Student **Maid**. Very happy repeat customer!
Was this review helpful? [Yes](#) - [No](#) - [Flag as inappropriate](#)

 **Mallika** - Apr 6, 2011
★★★★★ **As a mom of three boys working from home,** I need as much help as I can find and get. Student **Maid** definitely made my life easier. They kept my house immaculately clean while being professional, responsible and courteous. They babysat my three lively children while keeping them safe and entertained. The best resource in **Gainesville!** I can't say enough good things about them and recommend them to everyone.
Was this review helpful? [Yes](#) - [No](#) - [Flag as inappropriate](#)

 **KG** - Mar 31, 2011
★★★★★ 🙌 **They always want feedback and really make** their customers feel special, we are not just a number. We've been very happy with this service!
Was this review helpful? [Yes](#) - [No](#) - [Flag as inappropriate](#)

 **Herb** - Mar 29, 2011
★★★★★ **My wife thinks I am the BOMB for hiring** Student **Maid**. She is pregnant with twins and the last thing she wants to do after working all day is clean the house. She LOVES me for hiring Student **Maid** and because we are both Gator Alum we really appreciate their focus on keeping their employee/students focused on good grades. Great

Customer reviews will usually appear with your Google business listing. It's smart to have customers and colleagues create Google Maps reviews for your business.

Positive reviews are a powerful motivating factor for Google users deciding which business to buy from. First your reviewer must locate your business in Google Maps, click "More info", and then click "Write a review", then write the review, choose a rating, and click "Save".

Important note: They must be logged into their Google Account to write a review. If they're not logged in they'll be prompted to either sign in or create a Google Account. Their Google Account nickname will appear next to the review.

Google also pulls reviews in from 3rd party resources – this means those reviews can create incredible exposure for your brand. This can be a double edged sword though and many businesses have experienced problems with inaccurate or unjustified negative reviews.

Google advises that *"If you're concerned about a review that was submitted through Google Maps, click the 'Flag as inappropriate' link found under the review and submit a report. If we find that the review is in violation of our Google Maps policies, we'll remove it. Some reviews found on Maps listings are created on third-party websites such as Yelp, CitySearch, Yahoo, and Trip Advisor. If you feel that a review from a third-party site is inaccurate, you would have to express your concerns to the webmaster of the site where the review was posted. If the review is removed from the third-party website, the change will also be reflected on Google."*

Yahoo and Bing Local

Yahoo Local (only available in the U.S.)



Much like Google Places, Yahoo offers a thorough local business listing that is tied directly into their search engine. Unlike Google, Yahoo local listings are not tied to a local area map.

If you are using Yahoo for local searches in the U.S. it is likely that you see local directory results. Unlike Google, Yahoo offers a free basic listing but withholds many extended features for their “enhanced” listings which cost \$9.95/mo.

The free basic listing is limited to:

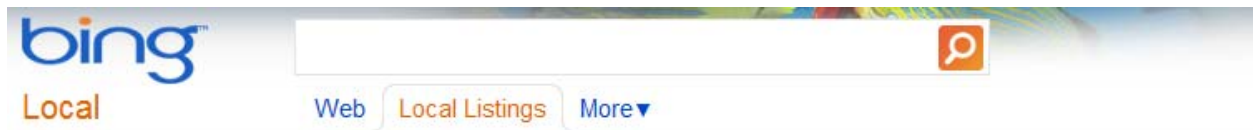
- Contact information: phone, website, address
- Hours of operation
- Products or Services

Enhanced listings include the above plus:

- Your logo and tagline
- Up to 10 company photos
- Detailed business description

Like Google, Yahoo integrates reviews from many different social networks and includes them in your local listing under a tab entitled “web reviews”. Yahoo also indexes review content which makes keyword friendly reviews a powerful ally – review content alone can literally help position you above your competition when local search results are returned. Be sure to create or claim your Yahoo local listing – often times the traffic here will convert very well. Yes, the volume pales in comparison to Google in most markets, but it’s still a great free resource for your business.

Bing Local



Bing's local listings now run through the Bing Business Portal and are tied to a map feature that is very similar to Google Maps. Bing's search volume has grown and many customers prefer Bing exclusively... registering with Bing's Business Portal will ensure that you are capturing the attention of these non-Google web prospects.

Within the Business Portal you can:

- Claim, create, verify, and manage local business listings
- Identify key search categories where you want your listing to appear
- Customize listings with enhanced details such as logos, photos, and more
- Create a mobile Web site (and free QR Code) so customers can learn about your business on their mobile devices
- Create a custom menu (restaurants and bars) for inclusion on a mobile menu
- Create Deals (coupons) and promote them for free on Bing (both PC and Mobile) and Facebook

Bing's listings also include testimonials and reviews from 3rd party sites like citysearch.com and Yelp. Make these reviews a high priority. Don't be afraid to ask for them! Trust and credibility are key components to your online success. The popularity of Yelp and other aggregator sites means that one positive review can carry significant weight across many different sites.

Note: The mobile website offering makes the Bing offering a great resource - one that you will want to take advantage of to round out your local SEO strategy.

Your Website

While local listings on various search engines have been emphasized, it is important to highlight that your business website needs to be optimized for your geo-targeted keywords. Standard SEO practices apply here and try to include your city or regional keywords in:



- Your URL
- Page Titles
- Meta Description
- H1 and H2 tags
- Throughout your site content

Refrain from keyword stuffing

Google hates it and so do your site visitors. It's easy enough to convey to both your readership and the search engines what your various pages are about without entering "black hat" SEO territory.

Are you blogging?

Blogging is a great way to increase your local ranking. It is easy for local businesses to include geo-specific keywords in posts about current events, local government policies or business interests. You can even add these keywords to your tags and create categories. Again, just make sure that you are writing FOR YOUR READERS and not causing harm by adding blog posts or categories that are geo-targeted but confusing.

Link Building Locally

Local link building opportunities abound – as long as you know how to find local sites. Here are some of the most obvious ways to build links locally:

- Use Social Media – Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn communities will help you network and find likeminded people that would be willing to link to your site
- Associations and Organization – are you a member of the Chamber of Commerce? Better Business Bureau? Local organizations like these will link back to your site and help search engines trust you as a local authority site. Don't stop there – can you think of other local groups you are affiliated with? Credentialed by?

- Query Local Blogs and Websites – you might live in an area populated by great local sites and blogs that you can tap into. Links from these sites establishes that local trust that the search engines look for so comment with links, offer to guest post or request a link for a valuable “local resource”. To find sites like this simply search for:
 - Your City + “Blog” or “News”
 - Your Zip Code + “Blog” or “News”
- Directories – finding local directories should also be easy. Use search queries such as:
 - Your City + “Directory “
 - Your Zip Code + “Directory “
 - Your Neighborhood + “Directory “

You can even do a statewide query for directories like this - you get the picture.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive link building list but a local compliment to conventional SEO that you are engaging in. Remember – content is KING! Writing valuable content will build credibility locally and not only attract Google, Yahoo and Bing but will also elevate your status as an expert with potential customers.

Congruency is Key

It’s vital that you maintain consistency in how you describe your company, list your address and other company specific information. Your website should include your company contact information in your footer – so that the local listings that you have worked hard to build can recognize your business. The biggest reward here will be when your site and places listing populates in Google’s new “O-pack” local listings.

Conclusion and Additional Resources

By now you should have clarity on the importance of local SEO to your business. If you are targeting customers regionally it is in your best interest to implement a local search strategy to ensure that they find you when and where they are shopping. Most resources are free. Others are very budget friendly and this makes for a high ROI activity.



Start with Google Places – it will have the most impact and as mentioned will help your organic search efforts for dual impact. Expand from there and focus intently on getting as many citations as possible. Not only will they drive targeted traffic to your site but they build much needed trust.

Last but not least – Measure your strategies effectiveness by carefully annotating updates and new listing creations in your analytics program and measuring traffic and conversion increases. Your metrics won't lie to you – your local SEO strategy should include many new listings so it's important to see which ones best suit your particular niche.

Local Citations – Here is a list of some of our favorite local citations:

1. Yelp – www.yelp.com
2. Foursquare – www.foursquare.com
3. Merchant Circle – www.merchantcircle.com
4. Yellow Book – www.yellowbook.com
5. Judy's Book – www.judysbook.com
6. Magic Yellow Pages – www.magicyellow.com
7. Dex Knows – www.dexknows.com
8. Local.com – www.local.com
9. Info USA – www.infousa.com
10. City Search – www.citysearch.com
11. Kudzu – www.kudzu.com
12. Insider Pages – www.insiderpages.com

Next Steps

If you are a company that is interested in growing your business and generating leads, [use HubSpot's free 30-day trial to learn how HubSpot's software can help you.](#)

**30-Day
Free Trial**

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