



# Epic Guide To Local SEO

COMPILED BY  
**advice**local

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**BILL HARTZER**

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Bill Hartzler is an independent SEO Consultant. He relies on his 20 years of direct SEO experience to provide technical SEO audits of websites, as well as technical link audits and link cleanups. Bill is known worldwide for his research on the topic of search engine optimization and gTLD domain names, as well as Dot Brand domain names.

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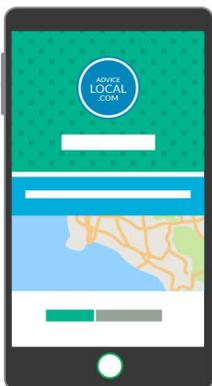


## Getting Started



The “Epic Guide to Local SEO” is a comprehensive resource examining local search engine optimization, local search ranking factors and the best tools for managing a business’ local presence online.

### *The way that customers find information online is changing.*



The devices used to conduct internet searches are advancing and search engines are treating location as an increasingly important factor in search results and website rankings. As search engine algorithms evolve to match consumer preferences for targeted, mobile-friendly, location-based results, we’ll continue to see a shift toward favoring local businesses in search results.

Local search engine optimization (SEO) plays a critical role for companies of all sizes and in virtually every industry. Everyone from small business owners to established agencies can benefit from a deeper understanding of local SEO best practices and strategies that help businesses rank higher, earn more traffic and attract new customers.



## Introduction to Local SEO

Increased website traffic often translates into increased sales or conversions. Unfortunately, the digital landscape is so competitive that many businesses struggle to get noticed online. Successfully marketing a business requires implementing local SEO to rise above the competition – quite literally – to secure higher placement in search results.



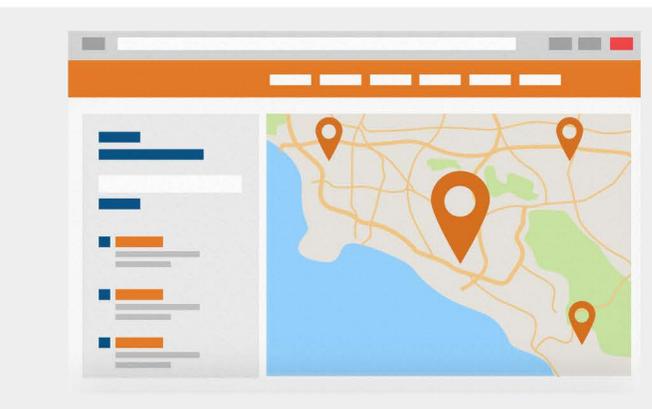
## What is Search Engine Optimization?

SEO is a digital marketing approach that aims to maximize visibility and earn a higher spot on search engine results pages (SERPs).

### *The goal?*

To boost web presence and make it easier for customers to find a business online.

Conventional SEO targets specific keywords and search terms that consumers are most likely to type into a search engine such as Google. Search engines use a series of ranking factors to evaluate the content, purpose, and value of a website. Ranking is determined based on how each site stacks up against the competition and how relevant Google deems it to be to a particular search query.



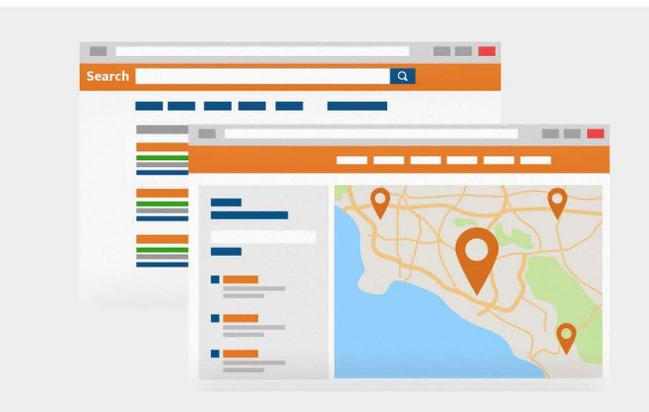
## What is Local SEO?

A local SEO approach makes it easier for nearby consumers to discover local businesses. It improves a website's visibility, increases relevant web traffic and drives revenue by connecting businesses with local shoppers. For brick-and-mortar locations, ideal customers are those who are interested in their specific product or service and their specific location.

Effective SEO involves targeting industry specific keywords (terms like organic coffee, shoe sale and dog walker) as well as location-based terms such as city names, neighborhoods and regions. Local SEO also encompasses factors that don't play a major role in traditional SEO, such as Google My Business, local directories and proximity to the searcher. A business that invests in local SEO is more likely to attract customers to their website as well as to their business location.

Search Keywords...





## Local SEO vs. Traditional SEO

So how does local SEO differ from traditional SEO? Whether a business already has the basics of SEO in place or is starting a new campaign from scratch, there are several reasons to target local search terms as well as industry-related keywords.

Conventional SEO works by using keywords, site design, link building, reputation management and social signals to help a website rank for keywords that their audience is searching for on Google. Local SEO takes these concepts a step further by targeting customers located nearby through geographical search terms. The most notable difference is the utilization of local keywords, NAP data, reviews and citations in local SEO to target nearby consumers.

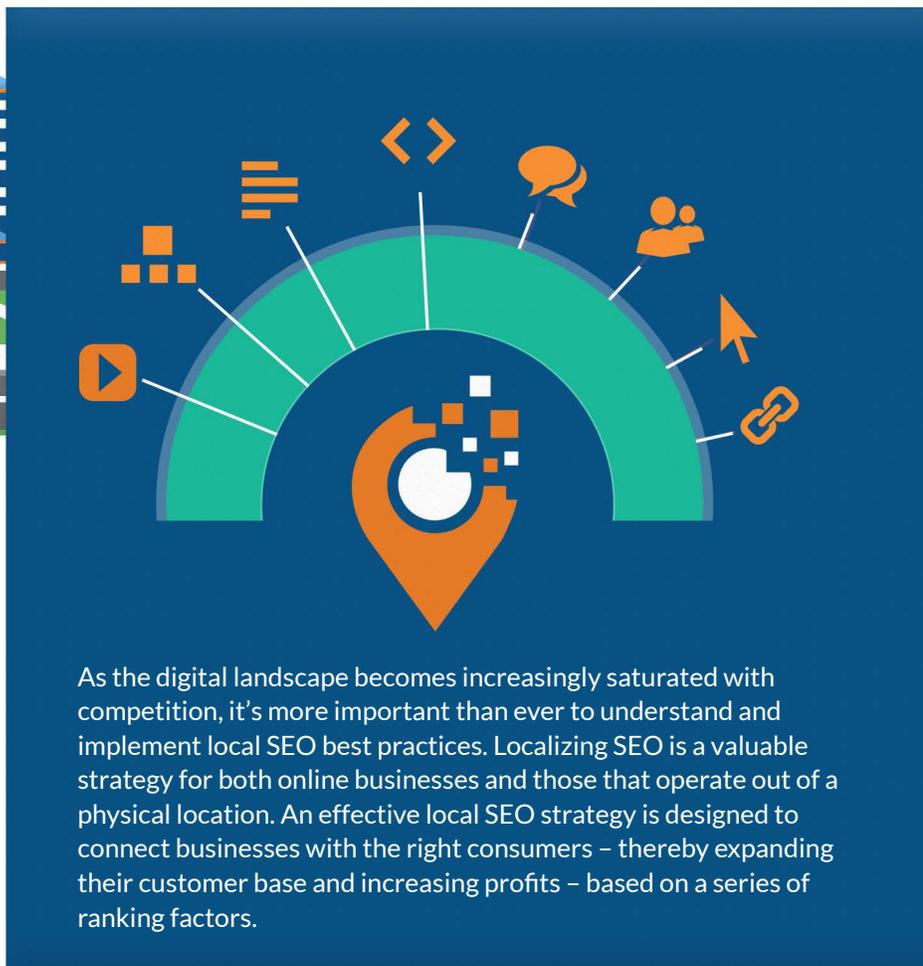
The difference between local SEO and traditional SEO might seem small, but it is significant. Some business owners make the mistake of assuming a traditional SEO strategy is enough to help them reach local customers and clients. Although traditional SEO is still essential to online marketing, SEO without a targeted local approach will only serve to broaden a business' web presence rather than allowing it to hone in on its desired target market.

## The Benefits of Local SEO



Focusing on local SEO allows businesses to:

- ✓ Target local customers
- ✓ Attract mobile consumers
- ✓ Rank higher in local search results
- ✓ Build brand awareness
- ✓ Drive web traffic
- ✓ Grow customer base
- ✓ Increase profits



As the digital landscape becomes increasingly saturated with competition, it's more important than ever to understand and implement local SEO best practices. Localizing SEO is a valuable strategy for both online businesses and those that operate out of a physical location. An effective local SEO strategy is designed to connect businesses with the right consumers – thereby expanding their customer base and increasing profits – based on a series of ranking factors.



## Local SEO Ranking Factors

Now that we've discussed why local SEO is so important for businesses, let's take a look at how a business can improve its local ranking. Local SEO is impacted by a variety of factors related to online presence. In order to get the most out of local SEO, it's best to optimize for all of them.

## Primary Factors that Influence Local SEO Ranking

### Google My Business

Claiming and updating a company's GMB listing is a crucial step toward maintaining a consistent, polished web presence and boosting local SEO ranking. We'll talk in more detail about Google My Business in the next section.

### Citations

Any online mention of a local business is called a citation. Citations can include a link to the website but don't always. Common citation sources include local directories such as Yellow Pages, Yelp! and Judy's Book.

### NAP

Stands for name, address and phone number. Both the quality and quantity of directory listings affect local SEO, but NAP consistency is the most important characteristic.

### Reviews

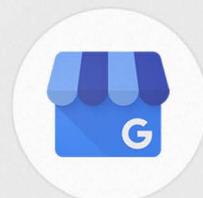
The diversity and veracity of customer reviews and ratings provides search engines and consumers with candid feedback about the business.

### Social Signals

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn allow companies to develop more personal relationships with customers and cultivate social proof that can influence search engine results.

### Links

Search engines look at the authority and relevance of the websites that link to a company's website. When it comes to backlinks quality trumps quantity, because any connection to untrustworthy websites will raise red flags for search engines.



## The Cycle of Clicks and Local SEO Ranking



***The more clicks a website receives, the better.***

There are two reasons for this. The first is obvious – more clicks means more website visitors, higher engagement, more conversions and more new customers. The second reason is that receiving clicks positively affects a company's local SEO. The more customers that visit and spend time exploring a website, the better that site will rank on Google, because the search engine recognizes that those visitors found value in the site's content. Basically, more clicks leads to better SEO ranking, which leads to more visibility, which leads to more clicks.

## How Competition Affects Local SEO Ranking

It's considerably easier for a company with less local competition to improve its ranking than it is for a business with lots of local competitors. In order to evaluate a company's local ranking, take a look at the local competition. Niche practitioners will find it easier to reach the top of local SERPs than more mainstream businesses. Regardless of how fierce the competition is, maintaining an updated web presence and staying on top of major algorithm updates is crucial.

## Google's Local SEO Algorithm Updates

Google is a perfectionist. The algorithms used by the search engine giant are constantly evolving and improving. Sometimes the updates are so minor and gradual that no one notices, and sometimes the updates are sudden and significant enough to send the SEO community into a frenzy.

Google is constantly improving its methods to serve up the best, most relevant local results to searchers. Regular algorithm updates make it easier for Google to identify and penalize scammers, which is great for consumers. However, the frequent updates can also present challenges for legitimate businesses attempting to stay up-to-date on local SEO best practices.

Some of Google's recent updates that seriously influenced local SEO include:

- Pigeon
- Local 3-Pack
- RankBrain
- Penguin Real-Time

## Google Pigeon Update

In July 2014 Google rolled out the Pigeon algorithm update to improve the quality of local search results. Pigeon gives preference to local businesses by customizing search results to the user's specific location. The algorithm calculates a customer's proximity to nearby businesses that match their search query to serve up the most targeted results possible. Pigeon is designed to benefit users – especially those performing searches on mobile devices – and local businesses that properly optimize for local SEO.



## What is the Local Pack?

The boxed-off business listings that appear directly below the map in Google's local search results are referred to by different titles: local 3-pack, snack pack and local stack, to name a few.

But whatever you call it, the top three local business listings on Google search results pages occupy valuable real estate. In fact, the only listings that appear above the local pack are paid results that are part of pay-per-click campaigns.

A business listing featured in the local pack displays the company's name, business category, rating, address, phone number, and hours of operation. The searcher may also find buttons for click-to-call or even buy. Businesses that fall below the top three positions in local search results are not visible unless the user manually expands the menu by clicking "More Places" – so it's easy to see how earning a position in the local 3-pack increases a business' exposure exponentially. The hard part is actually getting a business to rank in the top three local search results.



## How Google Determines Local Pack Results

Although there are no guaranteed tricks for nabbing a coveted spot in Google's local 3-pack, businesses should optimize their local presence to increase their chances of being featured. Google takes the following factors into consideration when choosing which local businesses to display:



### Google My Business

No business can land a spot in the local pack without a verified Google My Business listing, so it's necessary to create or claim the business' listing ASAP.



### Local Address

Businesses located in the city they serve are given priority, so setting up shop in the same place the business targets customers is ideal. However, to better serve mobile users who Google on-the-go, 3-pack results also change based on the searcher's exact location.



### Citations

Online business listings are vital to local search results. Certain directories are more influential and relevant in specific cities or states, so each business should tailor its strategy to ensure an up-to-date presence on the most authoritative local directories.



### Behavioral Signals

Increasing interaction with the business listing – either by improving the website's click-through rate or click-to-calls on mobile – signals to Google that the business is relevant to local consumers.



### NAP Consistency

The name, address and contact information on every page of a business' website should exactly match the details on its Google My Business listing and other listings.



### Personalization

Companies with strong branding, a user-friendly web design and unique content are more likely to be rewarded with a spot in the local pack.

## RankBrain and the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Local SEO

In 2015, Google integrated artificial intelligence (AI) into its search engine. RankBrain allows AI technology to complement Google's intricate algorithms to return even more accurate search results based on the user's intent. RankBrain makes it possible for Google to consider the thought process behind a consumer's search terms rather than just the surface-level meaning of the words entered into the search bar. RankBrain analyzes the meaning behind keywords and weighs information learned from previous search activity to display the most targeted results possible.

Businesses with a strong content marketing plan in place are likely already creating content that RankBrain will find valuable. However, websites that practice keyword stuffing or intentionally publish content that appeals to search engine crawlers but not to real people will not impress Google's AI. Rather than trying to predict how RankBrain will perceive the content, local businesses should focus on providing value to their customers. After all, any updates to RankBrain will only make it more intelligent, more human-like and more capable of differentiating between low-quality spam and high-quality content.

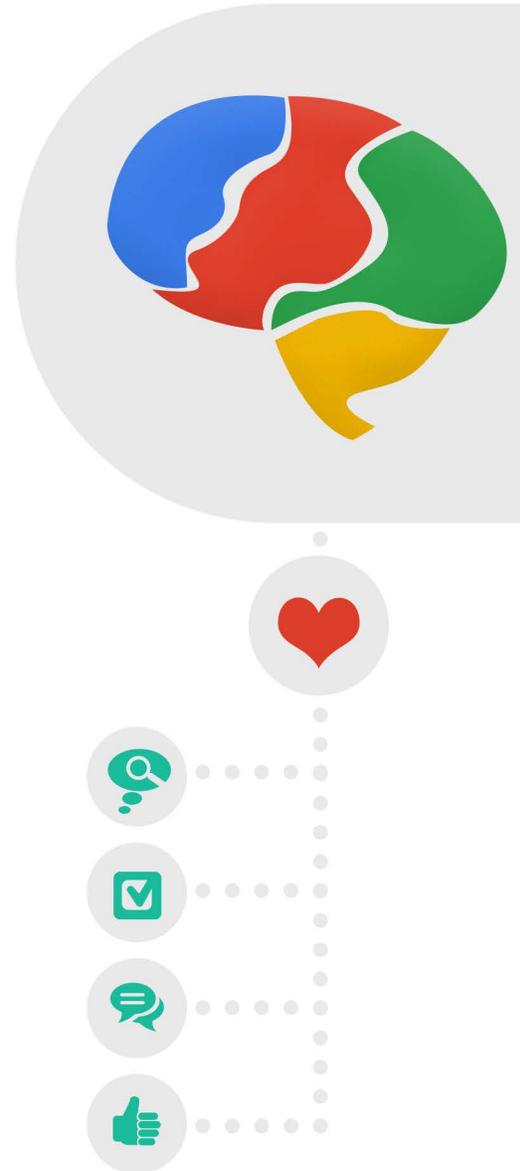
### Tips for Content RankBrain Will Love

**Think like a consumer.** Get inside the target audience's head, find out what they are searching for and tailor the website's content accordingly.

**Focus on solving problems and answering questions.** Frame content in terms of how it benefits the reader rather than just boasting about the business.

**Talk to real people.** Ask existing customers what common questions and concerns they have about the business or industry. Internal sources, like sales staff or account managers, can also provide insight into consumer behaviors.

**Learn from social media.** Take notice of what type of posts receive the most engagement and build a content strategy around that.



As Google continues to release algorithm updates and introduce new approaches, brands, agencies and SMBs should strive to broaden their understanding of local search and use that knowledge to develop an effective local strategy.

## You Are What You E-A-T

Good content can be measured according to E-A-T, or expertise, authoritativeness and trustworthiness. E-A-T is one factor that determines page quality, along with others such as main content, information accuracy and website reputation. The higher the page quality, the more likely a site/page will place higher in consumer search.



Main content now comes in many formats from traditional copy to videos, shopping carts and online games. To lead to higher rankings, each of these components must demonstrate expertise, authoritativeness and trustworthiness.

Whether a site is about gossip, games, or classified as YMYL (Your Money Your Life), all must possess “everyday expertise” according to Google. In this case, experts (or those who possess authoritativeness and trustworthiness) are people who have invested time and care into developing themselves or their craft.



Good, solid content has long played a role in establishing a website’s authority, and Google’s [\*\*Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines\*\*](#) reveal just how true this is.

## Google Penguin Real-Time Update

**Google has folded Penguin into the Google core algorithm and it now updates in real-time!**

Cleaning up a site and removing spam links makes Google happy, and it rewards SEOs by showing the change in rankings within a relatively short period of time. That long wait to recover from being penalized is over. And of course, real-time means that Google will no longer make announcements about Penguin refreshes.

This update is a win—there is no downside to SEOs unless someone is still practicing black hat link building. Those who are actively working to clean up their link profiles will be rewarded so much faster.

If you have questions about good links versus web spam links, consult an SEO company that knows the difference!



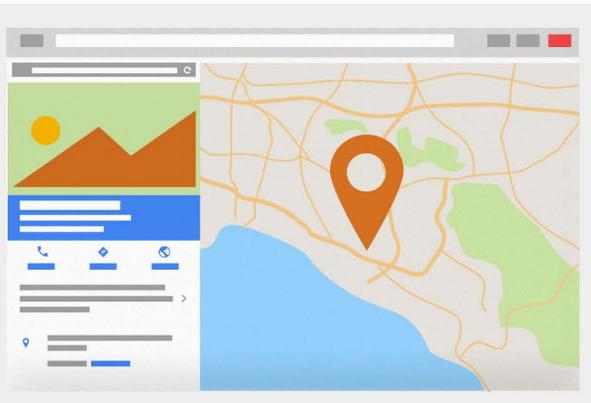


## Google My Business

When it comes to making a good first impression on potential new customers, managing a company's local presence on Google My Business is essential. Google My Business allows companies to tell Google what contact information and company details to display in search results, including Google Maps. As Google puts it, "businesses can manage their online presence across Google." Business owners can also use the platform to respond to customer reviews and share photos.

## Getting Started with Google My Business

Before this powerful platform can be leveraged to expand a company's local presence, the first step is to create or claim a Google My Business listing. Whether or not the business already exists on Google My Business, these are the steps to get started:



### 1. Create or Claim the Business' Listing

Either create or claim the Google My Business listing associated with the business to take control of the listing. Whoever claims the page is able to verify and edit the information shown when the business listing is displayed in Google's search results. Keep in mind that even if the company has not created its own Google My Business listing, an unclaimed listing may already exist as Google often generates listings automatically based on information found online. However, an unclaimed Google My Business listing leaves the company susceptible to an incomplete or inaccurate listing and therefore an inconsistent web presence.

To learn if a Google My Business listing exists for a particular company, search for the business name on Google. If there is a matching result and the "Are You the Business Owner" link is visible, the business listing can be claimed by following the link, signing into Google, searching for the business name and requesting verification.

However, if the matching search result does not display the "Are You the Business Owner" link, then someone else has already claimed the business. Try signing in with any Google accounts that might be associated with the business, and contact anyone else who may have already claimed it.

If the business is not listed at all on Google, then a Google My Business listing should be created and populated with accurate content and contact information.

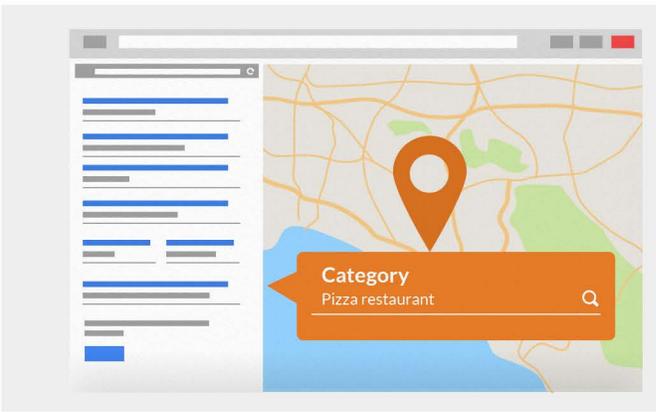
### 2. Ensure the NAP (Name, Address, Phone Number) is Correct

One of the main benefits of claiming and monitoring the Google My Business listing is to prevent the spread of false or inconsistent business details. Once a listing is claimed and verified, double-check that the contact information, physical address and photos accurately represent the business' brick-and-mortar location. Remember, NAP consistency is one of the golden rules of local SEO, so it's important to ensure everything is consistent across the web and with other listings.



### 3. Select an Accurate Business Category

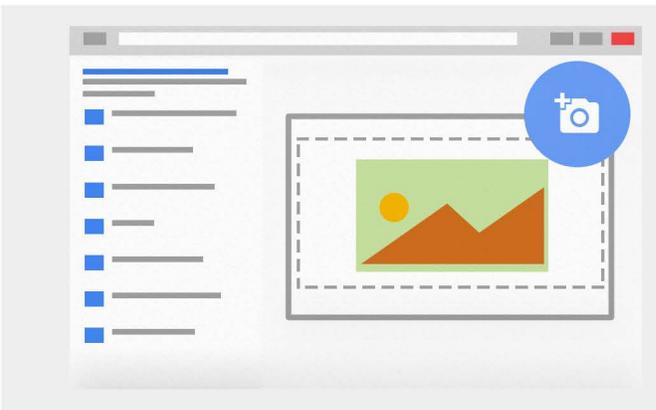
While it might be tempting to select as many categories as possible, it's important to only select categories that are truly applicable to the business. Misrepresenting a business online can harm the business' ranking, not to mention aggravating potential customers who feel like they're being deceived. It can be helpful to search Google for competitors to determine the categories they are listed under.



### 4. Upload High-Quality Images of the Business

The photos uploaded to a Google My Business listing are displayed alongside search results and shape a consumer's initial impressions of a business. Google My Business listings that include photos get 42% more requests for driving directions, and the click-through rate is improved by 32%. For best results, upload high-quality images that clearly depict the business or store location, along with some pictures of products.

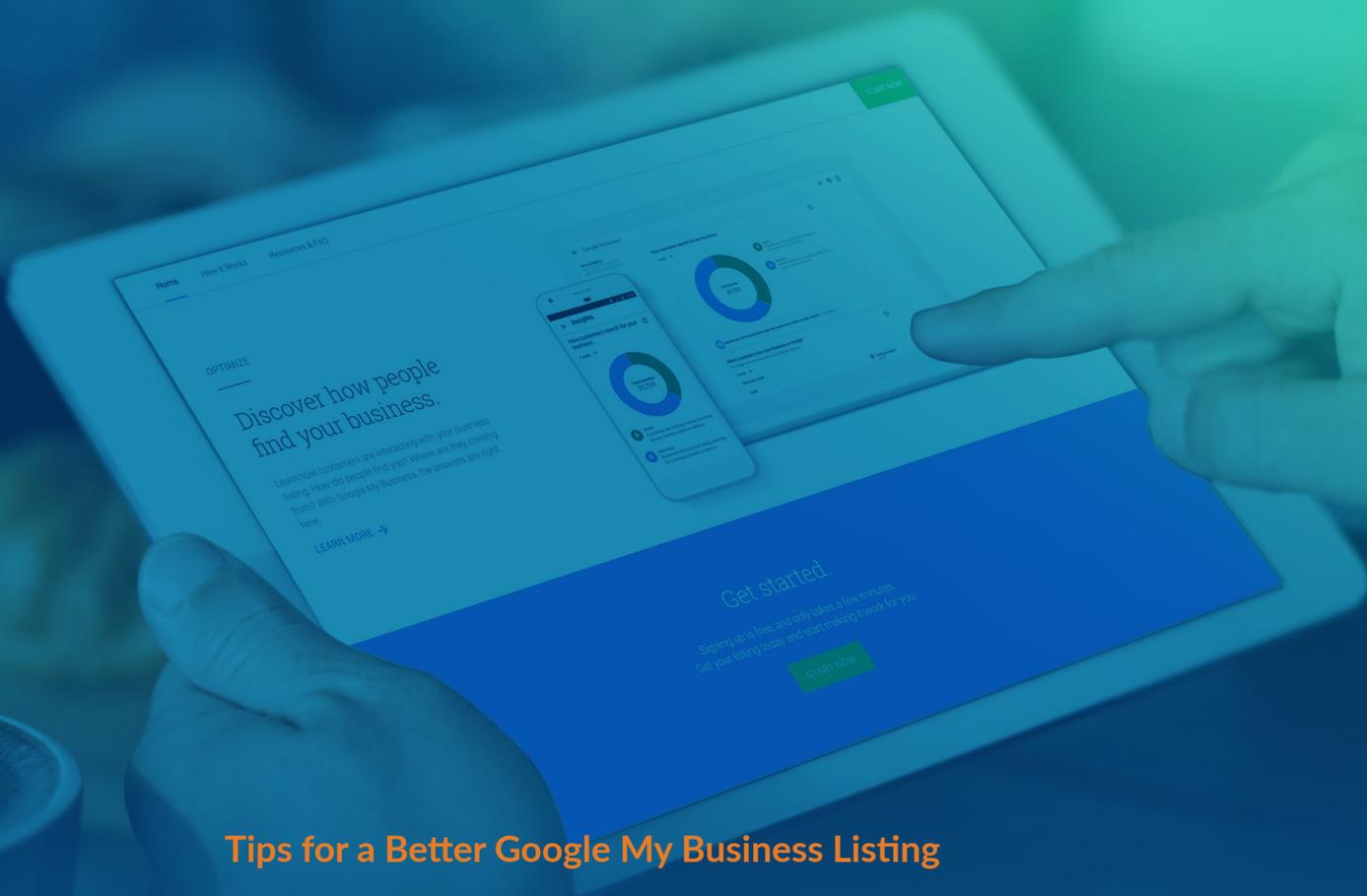
Businesses can recommend a preferred listing picture and cover photo to accompany search results. However, Google will only use the suggested images if they accurately represent the business and provide a helpful visual to consumers looking to visit the store location. That means steering clear of stock photos whenever possible and using something other than the brand logo for the listing photo.



### 5. Add a Brief Description

To add this brief description, log into the business' Google+ Page. Again, that is Google+ and not Google My Business. Include the address and describe the business so potential customers know what it offers, but avoid over-optimizing the description for search engines. Whether the goal is to have more consumers call to book an appointment, look up driving directions to the store or visit the website for more information, a description can influence how often potential customers are moved to take action.





## Tips for a Better Google My Business Listing



**Maintain an Active Presence.** To get the most value from Google My Business the listing should be actively managed and regularly updated. This includes uploading new images to reflect changes to the location, logo or product offerings.



**Report Inappropriate Content.** Monitor the business' listing for anything that doesn't align with the brand. Offensive, inappropriate and misleading content should be reported as soon as possible so Google can remove it.



**Show Off the Space.** In addition to uploading their own high-quality images, a business can partner with Google to photograph and offer a virtual tour of the office or store.



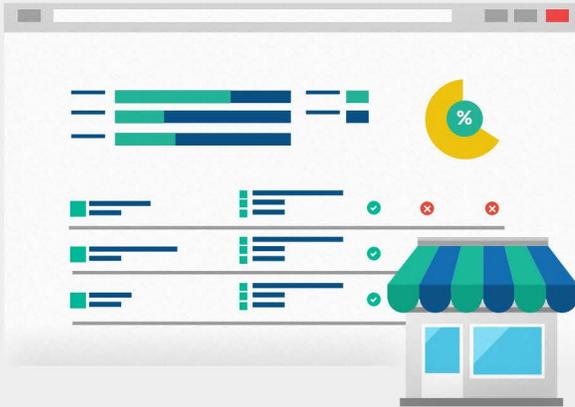
**Collect Reviews.** Encourage customers to leave reviews on the business' listing and reply to those who do – especially if the reviewer seems unhappy with any part of their experience.



## Building Local Citations

As one of the major ranking factors that help search engines evaluate websites, citations are extremely beneficial to local businesses hoping to get noticed online. A citation is any mention of a business, usually accompanied by the address and phone number (NAP), on an external website. A common example would be a business listing on Yelp.

## Building Consistent Citation Across the Web Improves Local Search Performance



### Higher Website Ranking:

Search engines use citations to keep tabs on how often a business is mentioned online. Businesses with more citations are regarded as more important and can therefore be ranked higher in SERPs.

### More Traffic:

A better ranking means increased visibility in local search results, so even citations that don't include backlinks can drive traffic and improve local presence.

### Added Trust:

Citations help a business earn the trust of search engines and customers alike. Consistent local citations help search engines verify that the business information is correct, and mentions of a business on high-authority websites endorse the brand in the minds of consumers.

## Where To Get Local Citations

There are a variety of websites that act as citation sources for local businesses. When it comes to building up a strong web presence, businesses should submit listings to a range of well-known, trusted sources such as data aggregators, business directories, review sites, and even local Chamber of Commerce websites.

### Recommended Sources for Building Local Citations

**1. Data Aggregators** – These data providers collect and distribute business information online. As a source of information for many directories and search engines, data aggregators are a driving force in the business data ecosystem.



**2. Local Directories** – Some local directories generate business listings based on data received from aggregators like InfoGroup and Localeze. New businesses should submit identical listings to relevant directories and verify their NAP information whenever a listing already exists.



More



**Review Sites** – Either industry-related or location-based review sites can provide citations if the correct address and phone number is listed alongside the business name. Customer reviews are also a valuable ranking factor taken into account by search engines.

**Social Media Platforms** – On top of boosting customer engagement, branded social media accounts provide an opportunity for citations. Make sure the address, contact information and website displayed on the business' LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook is accurate and complete. For visually-driven companies, a presence on Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube can also provide citation sources.



## Other Local Citation Sources

- Local blogs
- Chamber of Commerce websites
- Business associations

## Vertical Citations

The best citation sources vary slightly between different industries and locales. Researching where a business' competitors are listed can help identify which websites provide the most relevant citations for a given industry. Potential vertical citation sources include industry-specific directories, relevant blogs and consumer forums.



Examples of vertical niches include healthcare, restaurants, automotive, plumbing companies, lawyers, and so on. It's easier for robots and algorithms to understand the nature of such businesses and what they offer when they are listed on authoritative, niche directory sites.

## Balancing Citation Quality and Quantity

While there are plenty of websites that provide citations, it's important to be able to recognize the difference between high-value and low-value sources. Search engines will be more impressed by mentions on a reputable government website than a listing on an outdated directory full of unrelated backlinks. Don't lose sight of how quality affects local SEO in an attempt to increase the number of citations, as too many low-quality mentions can cancel out the local SEO boost gained from a few, selective high-quality citations.



## NAP Consistency

Another factor that influences the effectiveness of citations (in addition to quality and quantity) is NAP consistency, referring to name, address and phone number. Local search rankings are directly impacted by citation accuracy, so it's crucial that the information found across the web perfectly matches the name, address and phone number listed on the business website.



### Tips to Improve NAP Consistency

- ✓ Always ensure NAP information is correct in new business listings.
- ✓ Use a combination of APIs and manual directory submissions to disseminate accurate NAP data across the web.
- ✓ List a physical location on the website.
- ✓ Use a local phone number rather than a 1-800 number.
- ✓ Make sure the contact information on the company's website can be easily crawled by search engines and easily read by humans. For instance, don't include the NAP as part of an image that search engines cannot decipher.
- ✓ Use schema markup to identify your important data for search engines.

The importance of maintaining correct, consistent NAP across local citations, directories, websites and social media profiles cannot be overstated. Inaccurate NAP can damage local SEO and the business' reputation by leading to lower rankings, less visibility and reduced trust. Perform regular audits to ensure the listing is up-to-date and consistent with other mentions of the business online.

[The Complete How-To Guide for Local Citation Audit and Cleanup](#) explains the citation basics. Learn how the data got messy in the first place, understand how to optimize citations and more.



## The Importance of Reviews in Local SEO

Customer reviews provide businesses with three different forms of value: candid feedback on consumer experiences; social proof that minimizes the sense of risk for potential new customers; and a positive ranking factor that improves local SEO. While each of these benefits can improve a business' bottom line, let's take a closer look at how reviews influence search engine results pages.

As with citations and backlinks, customer reviews send signals to search engines that help them decide how a website should rank. Comments on official review sites are given more weight than those on less influential blogs or social media profiles. This means reviews are most powerful on authoritative sites such as Yelp, Amazon or Google. As you might expect, reviews that include written comments rather than simply a numerical score are considered more valuable by search engines.



## Encouraging Positive Reviews

As with a number of local search factors, quality is more important than quantity when it comes to customer ratings and reviews. It's better to receive a small number of extremely positive reviews than a large number of mediocre customer comments. Of course, the best case scenario is a wide range of glowing reviews across high-authority sites. While this is easier said than done, it can be achieved by actively encouraging customers to write positive reviews.

## Tips for Successfully Obtaining More Reviews

**Be Timely.** Target customers who have recently made purchases – ideally within the last three days – so the experience is still fresh on their minds.

**Be Social.** Leverage social media by sending out review requests to fans and followers. Facebook has a built-in review system that allows customers to review businesses directly on their platform.

**Make It Accessible.** Include links to a review page on the company's website, in email signatures and on sales receipts so that all new customers know where to go if they want to comment on their experience.

**Make It Easy.** People are more likely to write a review if they have clear instructions on where and how to post to it. As far as helping customers decide what to write, remind them of a recent purchase and suggest they leave a review if they're enjoying the product or service.

**Send Reminders.** Satisfied consumers are generally happy to leave reviews, but it's not one of their top priorities. A friendly email reminder can go a long way in boosting the number of reviews a business receives.

**Set The Tone.** The first review often influences the length of subsequent reviews so it can be worthwhile to ask a trusted patron to leave the initial review. However, because some review sites frown upon businesses soliciting reviews, check out the site's guidelines before doing so.



## Popular Review Sites To Leverage

Certain review sites are more established than others in specific industries, so it's worth doing a bit of research to find out where the business' main competitors are collecting the most reviews. There are often industry-specific organizations or directories that feature reviews of local businesses on their sites. Identify which review platforms make the most sense for the business and tailor the review acquisition strategy to meet the guidelines of those sites.

To get an idea of where to start, simply Google competitor reviews or industry reviews. For instance, searching for "plumber reviews" returns results that showcase the most popular review sites for plumbers. To narrow down the list to a targeted location, add the city name to the search query. Next, create company profiles on the most common review sites so customers can begin to leave reviews.

### Popular Consumer Review Sites



## Responding To Negative Reviews

When a business receives an unfavorable customer review, the impact is the same whether the complaint is valid or not. One bad review can drag down a business' rating; multiple negative reviews can tarnish the brand reputation and deter consumers from making purchases. Rather than ignoring negative reviews and hoping they won't do too much damage, it's best to respond promptly and professionally.

### Tips for Responding to Negative Reviews with Tact

- Respond quickly so the reviewer doesn't feel ignored.
- Apologize for the negative experience to defuse the situation.
- Offer to correct the mistake or reimburse the purchase.
- Maintain a cool and collected tone.
- End on a high note, either by emphasizing the business' desire to remedy the situation or by highlighting anything positive mentioned in the review.



In more sensitive or complex situations, try to redirect the exchange from a public forum to a private conversation. Respond to the issue on the review site and politely request that the reviewer contact the business via private message or a customer service phone number. Once the matter is fully resolved, ask if the customer might consider updating the original review to reflect the new positive experience.

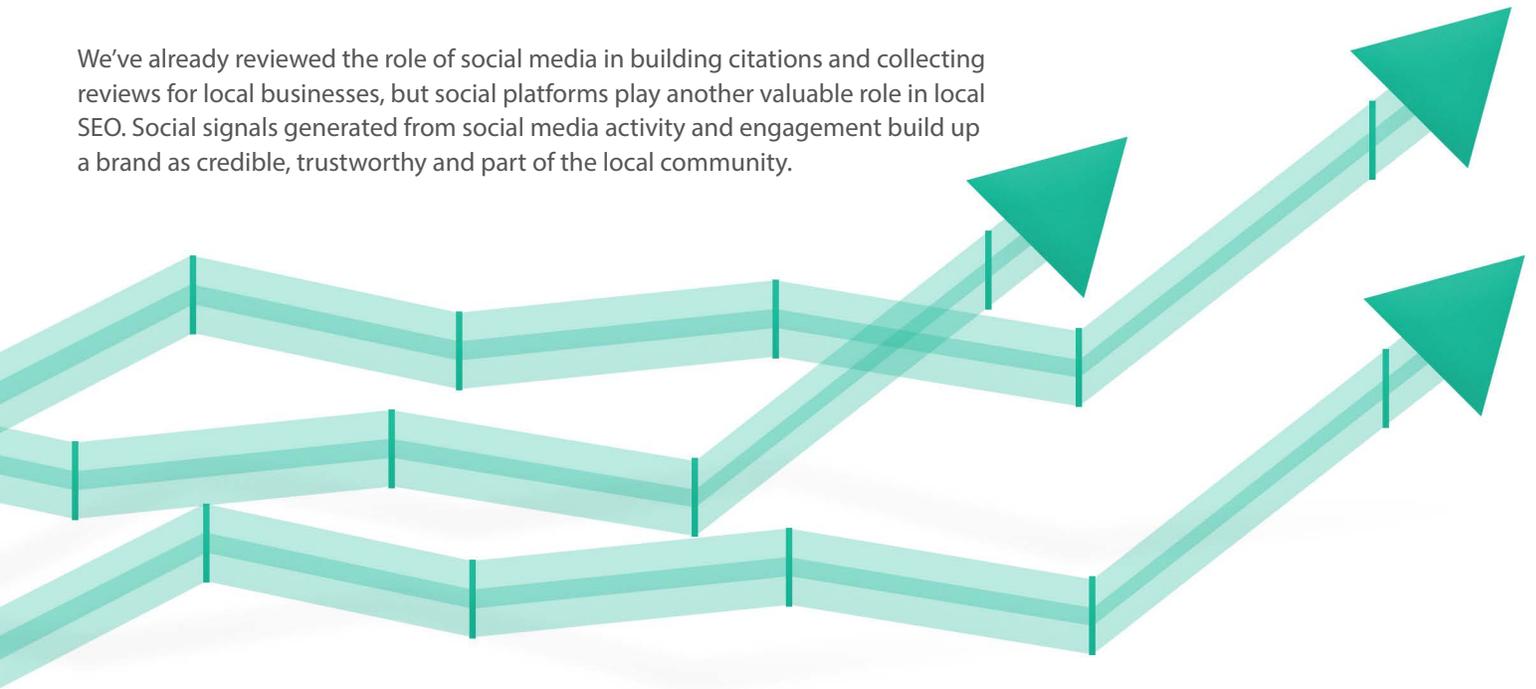


## Social Signals and Local Presence

Although there is some debate surrounding the exact impact of social signals on local search results, there are several indisputable reasons for businesses to use social media. Maintaining an active social media presence translates to more potential customers, authentic engagement opportunities and greater visibility for the brand – especially as the number of followers rises and the frequency of social signals increases.

## Positive Social Signals Boost Credibility

We've already reviewed the role of social media in building citations and collecting reviews for local businesses, but social platforms play another valuable role in local SEO. Social signals generated from social media activity and engagement build up a brand as credible, trustworthy and part of the local community.



### Major Implications of Social Media Activity



**Stronger Local Presence.** Social media makes it easier than ever for businesses to gain exposure and broadcast their brand personas online. When customers engage with a business on social media, it strengthens the company's brand within the local community. (Plus, all of those likes, retweets and shares provide invaluable publicity that can amplify the company's social and local presence.)



**High-Quality Traffic.** Not only does brand awareness skyrocket when customers engage with a business online, but website traffic also receives a boost – both in terms of amount and quality. The more often a blog post or other branded content is shared on social media, the more organic links are created back to the business' website.



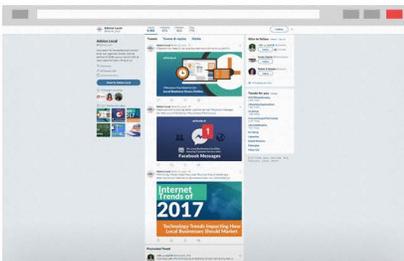
**Increased Sales.** The influx of traffic driven by social signals is often from visitors who are already interested in the business or its products, which leads to higher conversion rates and more potential sales.

## Social Platforms that Matter Most for Brands

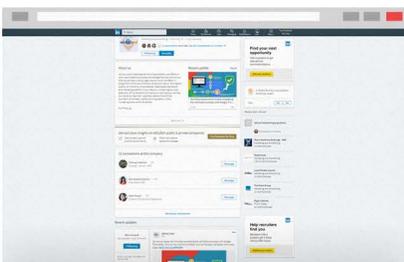
A social media platform is only as powerful as its users. The most important reason for a business to join a social network is that their customers are already there. Therefore, companies should consider where their target audience is most active online before investing time and energy into a social space that might be irrelevant. Although it varies slightly among industries, the best social media sites for most businesses are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.



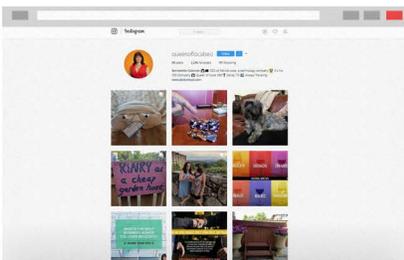
**Facebook.** Everyone who's anyone has a presence on Facebook. Not only does this social giant allow users to review businesses online, but it's also an ideal place to engage with fans, spread news about upcoming local events, hold contests and advertise new products or services.



**Twitter.** The ideal platform for sharing opinions, news and tidbits of information that can be expressed in 140 characters or less. Businesses on Twitter should post multiple times each day and promptly reply to any mentions or direct messages. Tweets containing links to articles, photos or videos receive more engagement than plain-text updates. Brands can use Twitter Moments to draw special attention to a topic, tell a story to their fans and include customer tweets as part of a Moment.



**LinkedIn.** A less casual forum than most social networks, LinkedIn targets professionals and offers B2B and B2C businesses a space to connect with their clients. The most popular content on this social network comes in the form of industry news, authoritative articles and company updates. Local businesses should use this platform to connect with one another and their customers, and share coverage from any industry-related events in the community.



**Instagram.** The built-in filters, cropping and editing tools make it simple for photographers of any skill level to share images that look professional. The platform also allows for short video uploads and Instagram Stories. This is also a great space for hosting photo-driven contests or curating user-generated content.

Other platforms to consider for marketing local businesses include Snapchat, Reddit, Pinterest, YouTube and Tumblr.



YouTube





## Social Media Tips for Local Businesses

- ✔ Include NAP information and a link to the business' website in the listing bio or description.
- ✔ If possible, verify the account so consumers know the listing is officially associated with the business.
- ✔ Take advantage of geotagging and use regional keywords as hashtags to attract more local followers.
- ✔ Schedule updates at regular intervals to keep it active, attract new followers and keep the brand top-of-mind for current followers.
- ✔ Keep followers interested by sharing a variety of content types including articles, images, infographics and videos.
- ✔ Respond to any customer comments and encourage conversation.
- ✔ Place social sharing buttons on blog posts so content can be easily shared.
- ✔ Link to the social media profiles on the website and in email signatures.

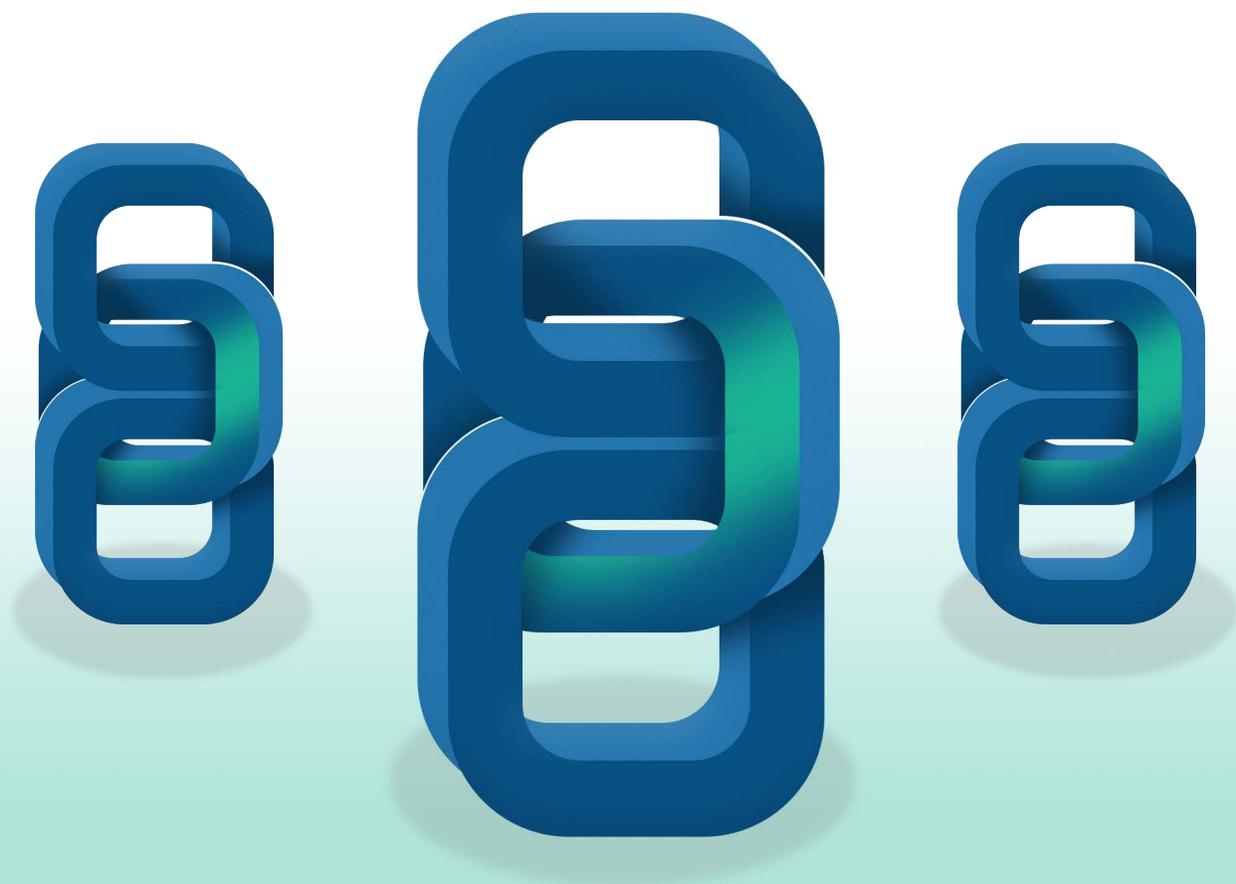
Whether or not they can directly influence search engine ranking, social signals remain a valuable indicator for improving local presence and gaining high-quality traffic from interested consumers.



## Link Building

People with limited knowledge of SEO often know that it involves links. And people who know everything about SEO understand that links are one of the more important search engine ranking factors.

The type and quality of backlinks leading to a website signals to Google whether or not the site should be considered credible. Since search engines aim to serve up the most relevant, high-quality results to users, link building can strongly influence the visibility of a business' website in search results.



## Tips for Local Link Building



**Create a local resource page.** If local customers find useful information on the company's website, there's a good chance they'll share the link on social media. If the page is extremely valuable, other local businesses might even link to it.



**Build relationships with bloggers.** If a local blogger is open to ideas, suggest topics that relate to the business or industry and ask that they link to the business' website.



**Network with other local businesses.** Talk to small business owners to see if they'd be willing to swap links.



**Reach out to community figures.** Determine if any prominent community members might be interested in helping local businesses gain exposure.



**Sponsor local teams or events.** This is a great way to get involved in the community, build goodwill and score an authentic backlink from a local organization.



## Pay-Per-Click for Local SEO

Another route for boosting local search ranking is pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. A PPC marketing campaign enables businesses to place paid links at the top of a search engine results page. This ensures that more potential customers see the listing and allows brands to reach their target audience with more certainty. And since businesses only pay when their ad is clicked, pay-per-click is a cost-effective and efficient way to connect with local customers.

## The Pay-Per-Click Guarantee

A pay-per-click (PPC) campaign is one way to guarantee a website will attract high-quality traffic in a short amount of time. PPC provides the fastest results for brands that need a quick boost in visibility to generate more leads and grow profits.



## Pay-Per-Click Campaigns for Local Businesses

In order to get the most out of locally-targeted PPC campaigns, businesses should make their ads as targeted and specific as possible.



### Be as Specific as Possible

When it comes to creating ad groups, local is better. Highly-customized PPC campaigns bring in more relevant traffic. Rather than running an identical campaign throughout an entire region or county, focus on tailoring campaigns for each city served by the business.



### Use Local Jargon

Write ad copy that speaks to the local community. Whenever possible, incorporate the regional dialect, local keywords or knowledge that only people from a specific city or neighborhood will understand. The most effective PPC ads only resonate with the customers they are directed toward.



### Include Local Callouts

Using ad extensions can further customize PPC ads with additional information about the business and its offerings. Including location in site links and callout extensions can help connect with consumers by emphasizing that the business is local.



### Use Analytics and A/B Testing

Whenever a business designs a new ad, it's important to track conversions and employ A/B testing to determine what works and what needs to be tweaked. Changes to a single campaign variable, such as keywords used in the ad or landing page copy, can impact performance and either improve or diminish an ad's click through rate.

A well-crafted pay-per-click campaign can result in high-quality traffic and help businesses connect with their ideal customers. However, for even better results, PPC should be used congruently with organic local SEO techniques, such as natural link building and on-page optimization.



## Website Factors

Local SEO involves both off-page and on-page elements that affect how search engines assess and rank a website. Off-page factors include items like citation building and backlinks, while on-page SEO refers to factors that are part of the business' website, ranging from content to code.

Optimizing a local business' website can improve its search engine ranking, draw more organic traffic to the site and increase the percentage of visitors who become new customers.

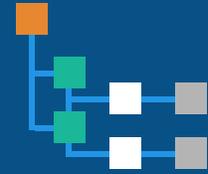
# On-Page Optimization Techniques

Descriptive meta titles and meta descriptions for each page.

< **TITLE** >  
< **meta** >

Geo-targeted keywords that fit naturally into titles, headings and body copy.

High-quality, relevant content with a local focus, including a dedicated location page.



Clean site architecture that search engines can easily navigate.



Apply schema markup to maximize Google's recognition of on-page elements like NAP.



**Google Analytics**

Use Google Analytics to reveal important data such as page views, average time on site, bounce rate and more.

Successful local SEO requires effective communication with search engines. The more clearly a website indicates its location and niche to Google, the better. Since search engines always want to display the most relevant search results, they look at several key on-page factors to determine the consumer who would benefit the most from a particular website. Businesses should optimize these on-page elements to demonstrate their relevance for potential search queries and help search engines accurately categorize their website for local search results.

## Local Keywords

Using targeted keywords helps search engines understand and rank websites accurately. When it comes to local SEO, it pays to be as specific as possible about geographical service areas. For instance, a business located in a large city with lots of competitors should use keywords that indicate the specific neighborhood or major intersection.

If a business is located in a small town or rural location and services customers for miles around, it's best to use keywords that include the county name or regional area.



## Tips for Optimal Keyword Usage

- Perform keyword research using tools like SEMrush.com, Moz's Keyword Explorer or KeywordTool.io.
- Target keywords that include the location as well as the type of services offered.
- Identify common variations and choose a unique focus keyword for each webpage.
- Include keywords in URLs if possible.
- Don't "stuff" keywords into places they don't belong. Content jam-packed with keywords tends to read as spammy and reduces trust.

## Creating Local Landing Pages

Search engines rely on a website's content to connect locally with the searcher. Optimizing a page's content for local search terms can improve ranking in organic search results, thereby introducing more potential customers to the business.

### Location Landing Page Techniques

The type of services provided

A custom Google map of the service area

The branch address, business hours and contact information

Schema that helps clarify the above important data for search engines in order to ensure visibility

Local trust signals (BBB, local awards & industry associations)

**LOGO** NAV NAV NAV NAV

## Dallas Heating & Cooling

**Company Name**  
Business Address L1  
Business Address L2  
City, State, Zip  
[Website Link](#)

**Hours**  
Monday: 9am - 5pm  
Tuesday: 9am - 5pm  
Wednesday: 9am - 5pm  
Thursday: 9am - 5pm  
Friday: 9am - 5pm  
Saturday: 9am - 5pm  
Sunday: 9am - 5pm

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**LOREM IPSUM DOLOR**  
Lorem Ipsum is simply dummy text of the printing and typesetting industry. Lorem Ipsum has been the industry's standard dummy text ever since the 1500s, when an unknown printer took a galley of type and scrambled it to make a type specimen book.

**CUSTOMER TESTIMONIALS**  
"Lorem Ipsum is simply dummy text of the printing and typesetting industry."

**Review us on**

**Review us on**

**Review us on**

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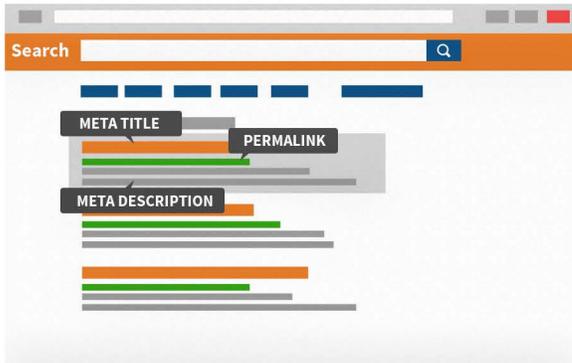
A mobile-friendly design

Unique local testimonials

Review links

## Optimizing Metadata

In the world of SEO, metadata refers to tags in a web page's code that contain short descriptions of what the page is about. The primary purpose of these meta tags is to help search engines better understand the website's content. It's important to write concise, unique, descriptive meta tags that include the focus keyword and relevant information about the page.



Although meta tags aren't visible on the web page itself, the contents of certain tags – such as description tags and title tags – are often displayed in search results. This means meta tags are often a significant factor in a user's decision to click on a web result.

The most important meta tags for businesses are title tags, description tags and alt tags. Each type of meta tag has an ideal length that ensures most of the snippet is visible when displayed in search results.

```
<TITLE> Page Title </TITLE>
```

**Title Tag.** Every web page should have a unique, descriptive title tag that contains the focus keyword near the start. The ideal length is 50–60 characters.

```
<META NAME="DESCRIPTION"  
CONTENT="Short Description"/>
```

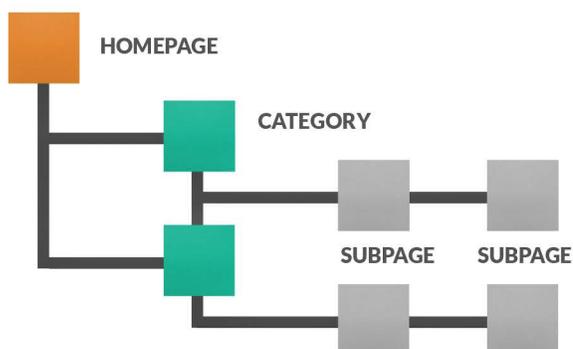
**Description Tag.** The description tag tells search engines what to display when the web page appears in search results. Keep meta descriptions between 150 and 160 characters to ensure the full snippet is displayed on results pages.

```
<IMG SRC="Image URL"  
ALT="Image Description"/>
```

**Alt Tag.** If the website contains any images, graphics or gifs, then alt text should be used to describe the visual. Alt tags are an opportunity to naturally insert keywords and help search engines and visually impaired visitors understand what the image is about. The character limit isn't as strict for alt tags as long as the image is described accurately.

## How Site Architecture Affects Local SEO

Site architecture is one of the more technical aspects of on-page SEO, but the concept is rather straightforward. Site architecture refers to the structure of a website. It's defined by how the web pages fit together, the hierarchy of which pages lead to other pages, and the URL paths that can be followed by visitors.



On the surface level, site architecture determines a user's experience navigating between pages on a website. However, the importance of site architecture extends beyond this to impact how efficiently a search engine can find and evaluate its pages. An uncomplicated site architecture is best as it allows search engines to quickly determine if the website is worthy of ranking higher in search results. If a search engine struggles to navigate a website or finds its architecture to be illogical, the site has a lower chance of appearing on results pages.

When designing a website, one of the first steps is to create a sitemap that lays the foundation for the site architecture. Ideally, a website should be built in such a way that users can find the information they want with minimal clicks, and search engines can easily crawl and index the pages.

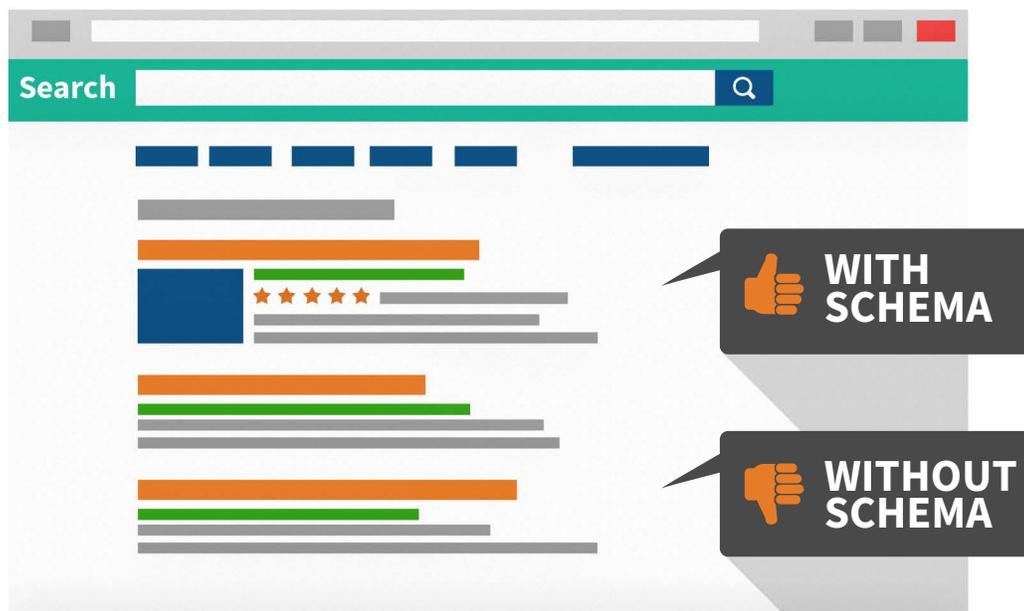
## Steps to Create a Clean, Functional Website Architecture

- Define the purpose of the website. This will serve as a reference point when assessing which pages are the most important, and should therefore be accessible from any point on the site.
- Categorize each page based on the type of information it provides.
- Create a page hierarchy by breaking down the main categories into subgroups.
- Plan out a navigation bar that can be placed on every page of the site. It should contain links to each of the main pages and make it easy to access subpages.



## Using Schema and Structured Markup to Optimize a Website

Another way to ensure a website is easily understood by search engines is using schema and structured data markup. Schema is a collection of agreed-upon tags that helps search engines figure out what's going on and identify the most important pieces of data on a website. The more accurately Google's algorithms can comprehend a website's content, the better chance it has of ranking on relevant search results pages.



[Schema.org](https://schema.org) provides a compendium of all the structured data markup that can be added to a website's code to improve communication with Google, Bing, Yahoo! and Yandex. We've already driven home the importance of NAP consistency – both on a business' website and across the web – and elements like NAP can be further optimized using schema. In fact, there's an entire reference [page on Schema.org dedicated to local businesses](#).



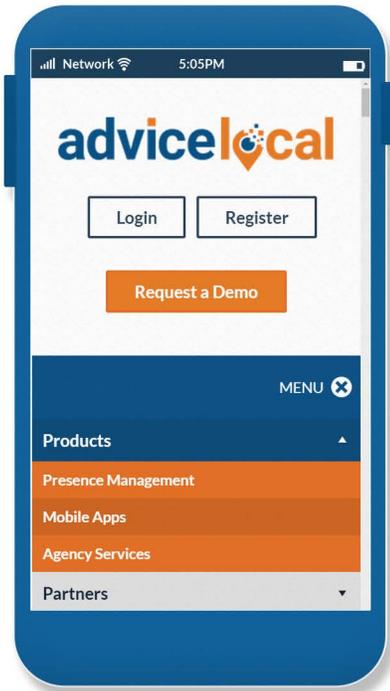
## Mobile SEO for Local Businesses

Another website factor that benefits local businesses is to ensure the site is mobile-friendly. Whether a website is impossible to navigate on a smaller device, won't load all of its content for mobile users, or simply looks bad on smartphones, having a website that doesn't cater to mobile consumers is bad for business.

For the 86% of small businesses that don't have mobile-friendly websites, it reflects badly on their brand, frustrates their customers and can negatively impact their search ranking. Plus, businesses that fail to incorporate mobile SEO and smartphone-friendly web design risk losing out on traffic from mobile devices, which accounts for 62% of all time spent on digital media.

## Offer a Consistent Experience on Any Device

Maintaining a consistent online presence goes beyond ensuring NAP information is accurate across the web; it involves creating a mobile-friendly website that provides the same information and interactions available to desktop users. Creating a positive customer experience requires optimizing a website for visitors on any device, whether they're using a phone, tablet or computer to search. A well-designed mobile or responsive website also reduces a website's bounce rate, strengthens a local business' web presence and benefits SEO.



### Tips for Providing the Best User Experience



Accessible and functional in every web browser.



Easy to read and navigate on all devices.



Responsive so it adapts to fit the user's screen or specifically designed for mobile users.



Quick to load content, images and video.

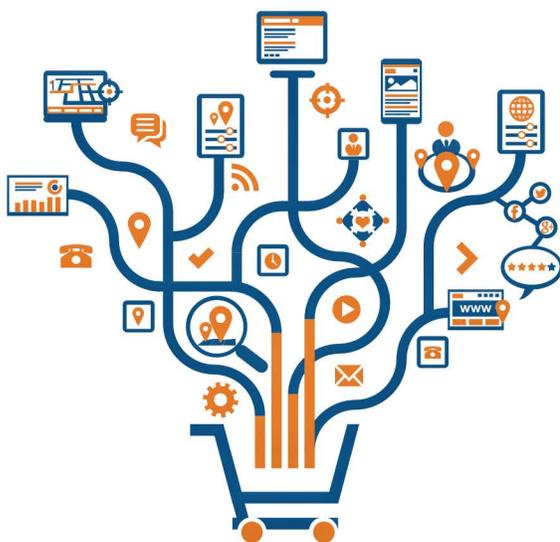
For more tips, check out this guide on [optimizing mobile for local businesses](#) and Google's advice for [websites that look great on mobile browsers](#).

### The Power of Micro-Moments

When it comes to engaging mobile users, micro-moments are the embodiment of small and powerful. Google coined the term "micro-moment" to refer to any instance of a consumer reflexively picking up their phone or other mobile device to learn, do or buy something. In these moments, the consumer desires instant access to information or an immediate action.

Micro-moments give brands another reason to provide up-to-date, accurate, easily accessible information to mobile searchers. Consumers crave instant results, and businesses should view it as a challenge to satisfy consumers in these "need-to-know" moments.

There are many ways local businesses can take advantage of micro-moments, including the 11 tips listed in this blog post on the topic: [Mobile Makes Micro-Moments Possible: 11 Must Do's To Capture These Moments](#). Examine the micro-moment in even greater detail with "[Consumer Micro-Moments & Businesses: Trends & Best Practices](#)," a BIA/Kelsey paper proudly sponsored by Advice Local.





# Make Your Site Mobile-First

## Google's Search Index will be Mobile-First

Google plans to split its search index into two separate parts – one for mobile and one for desktop – with mobile eventually taking over as the search engine's primary index. This means that having a mobile-friendly website will become increasingly necessary for businesses hoping to rank in local search results.

For even more resources on optimizing mobile websites for local SEO, check out the information available on Advice Local's blog.



[Mobile: One Size Does Not Fit All](#)



[Bringing Down the Mobile Curtain: Local Presence for Mobile Search](#)



[Making the Most of the Mobile Experience](#)



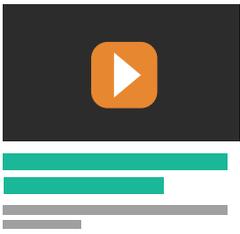
## Video for Local SEO

Humans are visual creatures. We enjoy visual content, which explains why consumers tend to spend more time on pages that give them something interesting to watch. Video presents an opportunity for businesses to offer value and information in a format that engages potential customers better than plain text or static images. Plus, branded video content is an excellent way to show off the business' personality while speaking to consumers in a medium they love.



## Benefits of Using Branded Videos to Boost Online Presence

- Increased engagement and consumer interaction.
- Visitors spending more time on the web page.
- More opportunity for sharing branded content on social media.
- Higher conversion rates, since videos can build trust and influence purchasing decisions.
- Potential to reach the huge audience of over 100 million people who watch online videos daily.



## Optimizing Video to Improve Local Presence

Since video is an increasingly popular medium for businesses, there's a growing amount of content competing for consumer attention. Follow these tips for creating and optimizing video content to connect with consumers and improve local SEO.



**Insert Keywords.** As with any type of digital content, videos should be optimized to maximize the number of views they receive. Use relevant keywords with a local focus in the video's title, description and tags in order to boost visibility in search results. YouTube also uses keywords to choose related videos to display on the sidebar, which allows businesses to target customers who are already engaged with the platform and seeking out similar content.



**Start Geotagging.** In addition to including local keywords in the title, local businesses should use geotagging to add location information to their videos. YouTube allows users to geotag videos with location details, which can help search engines identify the local focus of the video and make it more likely to appear in local results.



**Think Mobile.** Over 50% of all YouTube views take place on smartphones or tablets, so it's important to create video content that looks good on screens of any size. Keep the video simple and avoid cluttering the frame with details that won't show up clearly on mobile devices. Since many mobile viewers watch videos without sound – particularly on social media platforms like Facebook where videos auto-play – it also helps to add subtitles.



**Include NAP.** Local businesses should capitalize on every opportunity to insert their NAP information, and a video description is the perfect place to do so. Also be sure to add a link to the business' website for visitors who arrived at the video from an external source.



**Keep It Short.** As mentioned earlier, consumers have a lot of content competing for their attention. A busy customer browsing content on their smartphone is much more likely to watch a short, fun clip than to sit through a lengthy video. However, if the purpose is to explain a complex concept or offer in-depth tips for using a product, longer videos of 5–10 minutes might be appropriate.



**Get Social.** There's no point in creating a brilliant video and then leaving it to collect dust. Local businesses should leverage their social platforms and share the video across as many channels as possible to reach a wide audience. Encourage fans and other community members to comment and react on social media to get even more views.



**Embed Online.** In addition to sharing the video on social channels, businesses should embed it directly on their website. This allows customers to easily learn more about the brand and increases the chance of the video showing up in search engine results. If the video is already uploaded to YouTube, simply click on the Share button below the video, click Embed and then copy and paste the code into the website's HTML.



## The Rise of Live Streaming

One of the hottest trends in social media, live streaming gives brands the chance to connect with consumers in real-time. Businesses can use live streaming to give customers a behind-the-scenes look at their daily operations, provide updates about the company or offer live tutorials related to their product or industry. Live streaming is yet another example of how social media can break down the barriers between consumer and brands. The top live streaming platform is Facebook Live. The space is still growing and alternatives will continue to emerge.



## Negative Local SEO Ranking Factors

In most cases, businesses protect themselves from negative SEO factors without even realizing it, simply by focusing on improving their online presence. Common negative ranking factors (like inconsistent NAP) are easy to combat because they're the exact opposite of a positive ranking factor (like NAP consistency).

However, it's still worth taking a closer look at negative ranking factors to develop a deeper understanding of how search results are determined. Local businesses should be aware of any potential mistakes they're making so they can avoid search engine penalties.

## Negative Ranking Factors Detrimental to Local Businesses

**No Local Address.** A lack of physical location listed on the website or Google My Business listing spells trouble for local SEO. For a business trying to rank in local results, it's vital to have a legitimate local address so Google can trust that it exists in the real world.

**No Local Phone Number.** Failure to list a local phone number or listing multiple locations with the same phone number is another way to lose credibility among search engines.

**Uncrawlable NAP.** If search engines are unable to identify the business' NAP information, then that business will be unable to rank in search results. Avoid displaying contact information as part of an image, because Google won't be able to detect it. Make indexing the website as easy as possible for search engines by using schema markup.

**Google My Business Errors.** Any mistakes on Google My Business, such as outdated contact information or an incorrectly categorized business will reduce credibility and hurt the website's ranking. If a business moves to a new address, the information on Google My Business and other website listings should be updated immediately to avoid penalties.



## Negative Ranking Factors that Apply to All Businesses

- Duplicate content
- Lack of helpful content
- Over-optimized copy or use of unnatural keywords
- High bounce rate (visitors leaving without spending much time on the site)
- Lack of mobile optimization
- Slow loading pages
- Broken links
- Low-quality inbound links
- Lack of title tags

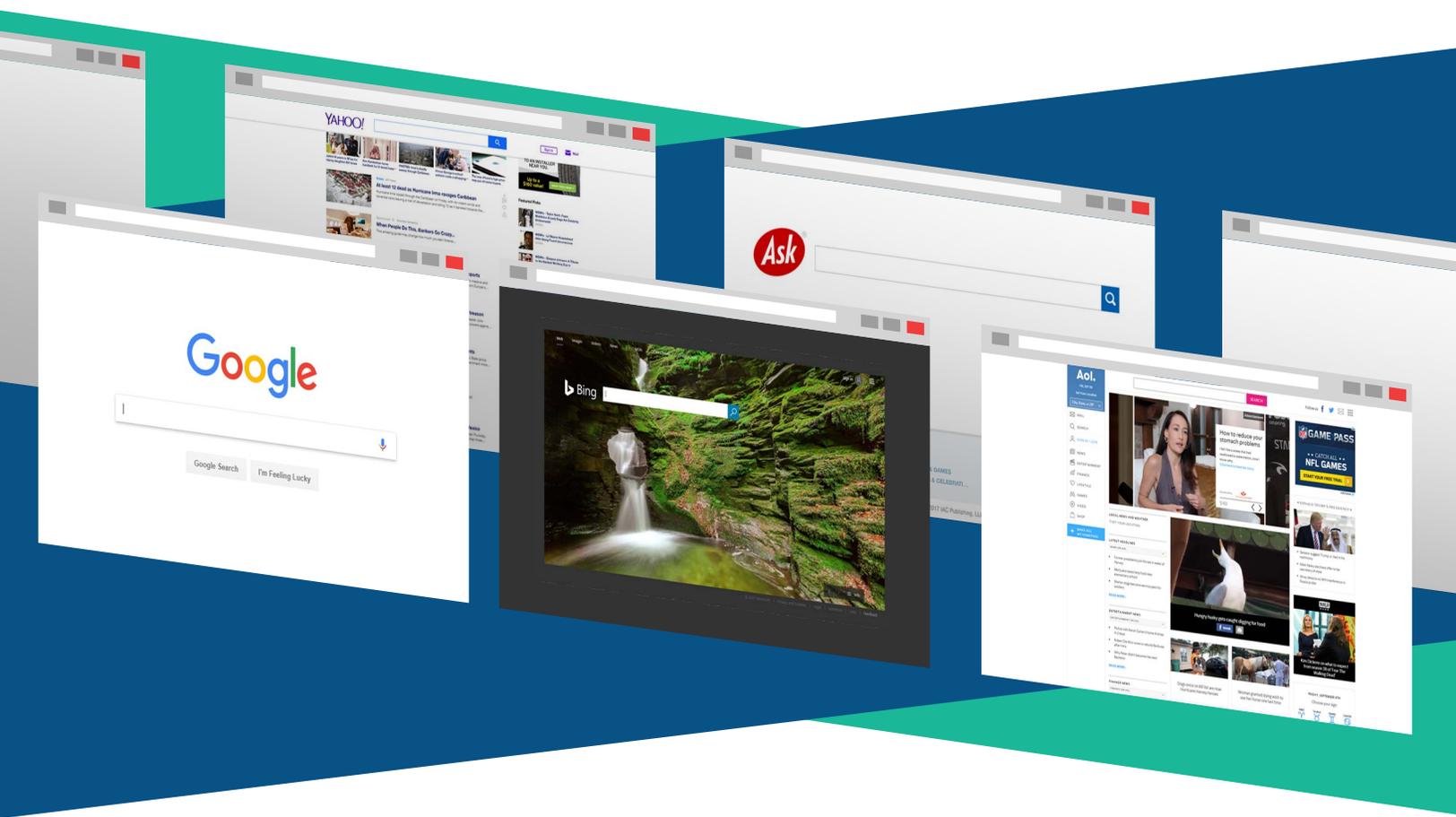




## The Future of Local SEO

By constantly adapting to better serve consumer needs, search engines introduce new hurdles that businesses must overcome to optimize their websites for local search. Though it's impossible to predict exactly how SEO will evolve in the coming years, we can expect new trends to continue to emerge and impact the world of local search.

## Emerging Local SEO Trends



There are a number of local search trends that will progress over the next few years. Here are some of the most important developments we're witnessing in local SEO.

- **Search engines are becoming more human-like**, especially now that Google's RankBrain is active.
- **Local search results will become more competitive.** The importance of local results will place more pressure on businesses fighting for the top spot.
- **Local search is getting more targeted.** Search results are increasingly influenced by geolocation and a consumer's proximity to local businesses.
- **Mobile optimization.** Consumers want websites that are easy to navigate on any device.
- **Google's mobile index** will become the primary index for search results.
- **Voice search is gaining prominence.** As voice search becomes more accurate and smartwatches become ubiquitous, businesses will need to adjust their strategy to account for how speech patterns differ from typed searches.
- **Micro-moments and content.** As Google Marketing VP Lisa Gevelber puts it: "Being there is the first half of the equation –equally important is being useful." Search engine algorithms detect the quality of content, so avoid filler. To capitalize on micro-moments, publish regularly and keep the site updated.



## Setting Up Local Businesses for Future Success

As search results get more targeted, local and mobile-focused, the links between local search, social media and mobile marketing are gaining significance. Business owners, agencies and marketers can all benefit from paying attention to consumer behaviors as an indicator of how search engines will modify their algorithms in the future.

The only way to stay on top of the latest SEO best practices is to keep an eye out for algorithm updates and be willing to adjust marketing strategies as often as necessary. In the meantime, businesses can position themselves for success by crafting a web presence that is consistent, authentic, human and local.



# The Best Local SEO Tools and Resources

Here is a collection of free and paid tools that make local SEO easier and more effective.

## Keyword Creation and Checking

- Google's Keyword Planner
- Keyword Tool
- Long Tail Pro
- SEMrush
- Übersuggest
- Wordstream
- Yoast

## SEO Auditing and Competitor Analysis

- Advanced Web Ranking
- GeoRanker
- Local Search Rank Checker
- Online Visibility Report
- Pingdom Website Speed Test
- Rank Tracker
- Screaming Frog SEO Spider Tool
- SEO Crawler
- Serpstat
- Website Auditor

## Other Helpful Resources

- Local SEO Checklist
- Best SEO Tools
- RocksDigital.com
- What's Trending? Must-Know Data Points from the 2017 Internet Trends Report
- The Mobile Guide: 18 Tips to Master Local and Mobile
- An Introduction To Social Media Marketing: A Guide for Small Businesses
- The Complete How-To Guide for Local Citation Audit and Cleanup
- The Guide to Store Locators and Location Landing Pages
- Making the Most of the Mobile Experience

## Review Requests and Monitoring

- Free Review Monitoring
- Get Five Stars
- Grade.us
- Review Handout Generator

## Social Media

- Hootsuite
- Dlvr.it
- Buffer
- Sprout Social

## Citation Building and Listing Monitoring

- Moz Local
- BrightLocal
- Advice Local

## Schema Creation and Testing

- Google Structured Data Testing Tool
- Jsongen
- Schema.org

