



**VOICE SEARCH FOR LOCAL
BUSINESSES, FRANCHISES AND BRANDS:**

THE GUIDE TO GETTING FOUND

By Bernadette Coleman

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advicelocal

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



BERNADETTE COLEMAN

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Bernadette is the CEO of [Advice Interactive Group](#) (AIG), an award-winning Inc. 500 company. Brands under the AIG umbrella include [Advice Local](#), [BubbleLife Media](#), and [Rocks Digital](#) to name a few.

Bernadette has been actively involved in digital marketing with an emphasis on local SEO since 2001. She focuses on developing enthusiastic and innovative teams to research, create and develop exciting digital marketing strategies for AIG clients.

Known to industry peers as the Queen of Local SEO, Bernadette's constant focus is on how business—small and large—can leverage content marketing, search engine optimization, and social media to dominate local search.

This focus led to the creation of [Advice Local](#), a citation submission technology that helps businesses “get found” easier and more quickly on Google, Bing, and other local business directories.

Among the awards she has received in recognition of her achievements, Bernadette is extra-proud of her Female Entrepreneur of the Year – Stevie® Award and Internet Marketing Association's Internet Marketer of the Year. Succeeding as a female CEO is no small feat, and she strives to inspire women each day.

As co-founder of the popular news site, [Rocks Digital](#), Bernadette has helped create a digital marketing resource with an influence that transcends the competition. Educating the digital community via this website along with her other endeavors feeds her soul, and pushes her not only to track and follow trends, but to create them.

Her efforts to educate and enlighten include regular contributions to national digital marketing publications such as [Search Engine Journal](#), [Social Media Today](#), [LSA Insider](#), [Local Search Forum](#), and [Forbes](#).

Bernadette and her husband Tom also work as advocates for brain injury awareness through their co-founded nonprofit, [TryMunity](#).



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INTRODUCTION

It is quite common to see voice search being discussed as a trend for the future. However, voice search is happening right now. Voice-enabled technology is very much part of the mainstream, with devices powered by Alexa, Siri, Cortana and Google Assistant becoming a staple in many homes.

Local businesses can think of new technologies as a challenge. But the reality is they need to step up their game – if they don't want to lose potential customers to the competition. After all, when a consumer uses voice to search for a product or service, most times they only get one result. That means if a business is not the top result, then they are not getting found.

People of all ages are tapping into voice search to find goods and services in their area. This is a great way of getting to know the local consumer. According to a study by BrightLocal, 58 percent of consumers researched a local business using voice search over the last year! From restaurants to restoration companies, people are interested in local businesses.

As you might suspect, smartphones and mobile devices are the leaders in voice searches, meaning that consumers are likely on the move and ready to make a purchase. Just as placing a focus on mobile strategy became a necessity as smartphones took off, voice-enabled technology means that voice search is truly becoming a necessity for local businesses.

It's only natural that voice search will serve different purposes for different industries. Retail, for example, is a sector where users can quickly locate stores selling the items they want. Buying a home, however, is typically a process where a user would conduct deeper research using text search. As voice search technology improves and users become more comfortable with it, every industry can anticipate a rise in usage. But before you can begin optimizing for voice search, it's important to get a deeper understanding of the technology.

So where do you start? Right here – we're going to help you with this today! Downloading this guide is a great first step.



WHAT IS VOICE SEARCH?

In brief, voice search is a technology that allows users to perform internet searches by speaking aloud instead of typing into a search field. This is extremely convenient when your hands are otherwise occupied, or when you're having a hard time seeing the screen due to lighting or vision issues.

WHERE CAN YOU DO A VOICE SEARCH? AND, FOR WHAT?

You can do a voice search almost anywhere – and at any time. Any device with a microphone is generally capable of conducting a voice search, including mobile devices, laptops, tablets, and smart speakers. Voice recognition and language processing has led to rapid improvements in the technology, so that a great percentage of searches are accurate, and voice assistants (sometimes called digital assistants) are paving the way.

A test examining performance conducted by **Stone Temple Consulting** (updated in May 2018) found that Google Assistant was the best performing service on mobile.



Of the 5,000 questions asked, Google Assistant attempted **78 percent** and answered correctly 93 percent of the time.



Siri attempted to answer the fewest questions at 40 percent, but achieved accuracy of 80 percent.



Alexa and Cortana both achieved a success rate of over 80 percent.

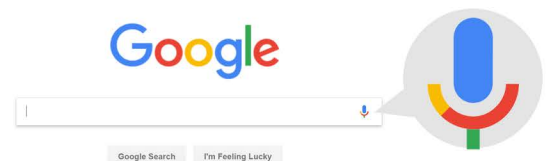


When Siri was first released in 2010 it was hardly taken seriously. However, as time has passed and Siri and the other voice assistants have increased their accuracy, usage has also increased.

VOICE SEARCH ACCURACY WILL CONTINUE TO IMPROVE

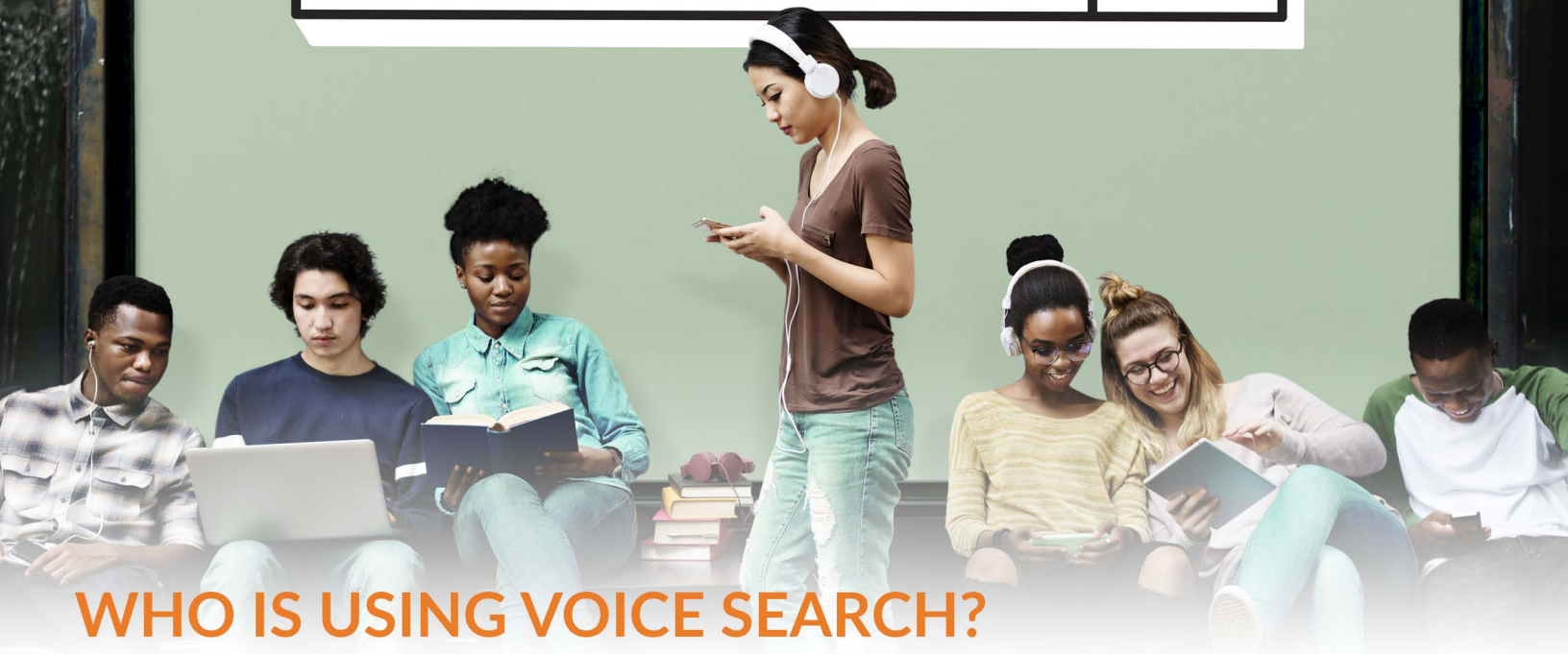
Today voice search is a viable alternative to a typed search, and over time accuracy will continue to improve. One of the reasons voice assistants have been so successful in recent years is because mobile usage has increased – but also because today's consumer has changed! They want everything fast, easy and accurate. The search process is now more practical, easier, and faster than ever before, particularly for location-based queries.

Using voice assistants brings a new approach to queries. Look at this as being similar to the way Google users were conditioned to using the search field.



Voice search is particularly useful for getting quick answers, but the questions might be longer and more complex than the traditional text search – something to consider when optimizing content. But there's good news for local businesses, as users are performing a high percentage of searches with local intent. As people become more accustomed to the technology, the potential for voice search to grow is quite clear.

Listening...



WHO IS USING VOICE SEARCH?

As internet use has grown over the years, search engines have really become second nature to every demographic. While voice search in particular has been led by younger age groups, each generation is consistently using voice assistants. Back in 2014, Google found that teenagers were most likely to use voice search – more than half used it daily – while adults were also becoming regular users. And things have certainly changed since then!

More recently, Stone Temple Consulting found that those in the 35–44 age group were the largest users. The 25–34 age range reported they were most comfortable using voice search in public. As voice command technology becomes more prevalent, a wider demographic range will undoubtedly feel more comfortable using it on the move.



35–44

Age group were the largest users.

25–34

Most comfortable using voice search in public.

Young people growing up with mobile devices and voice assistants are already comfortable with voice search. Social media platforms, like Snapchat and Instagram's Stories encourage users to speak into their phones, recording videos for friends and followers. Voice notes have also become a popular way of communicating quickly with friends. Speaking into a mobile device or voice assistant is a natural extension of using these apps, making searches easier and more practical.

VOICE SEARCH – IT'S NOT JUST FOR KIDS ANYMORE

Even older generations, typically more resistant to change and new technology, are increasing their use of voice-enabled technology. Avoiding a tiny keypad or a glaring screen, plus the practicality of voice communication and the benefits of smart home technology are some of the reasons we're seeing this particular behavior. As every generation gets more familiar with the processes and how to use these smart devices, voice search becomes a natural method for discovering information.

The consensus is that users will only increase as time goes by. ComScore predicts that by 2020, 50 percent of searches will be voice-based, which makes sense, because as more and more consumers get comfortable with voice search and trust the answers they are getting back, the popularity will only increase.



50%



WHY ARE VOICE ASSISTANTS IMPORTANT?

When a new technology is introduced to the public, there is always some hesitation. Is it worth learning how to use and get comfortable with, only to have it discontinued a couple of years later? That does happen, so in the beginning it's only natural to find some resistance from users.

Voice assistants and voice search have been around for years now, but it seems that only in the last few years they've gained enough strength to make a significant impact. After all, switching from typing to talking is a major transition, but it seems users are embracing this change.



30,000



4%



Smart Speaker Ownership 2018

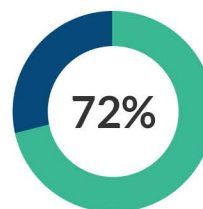
THE PRACTICALITY OF IT ALL MAKES ITS POPULARITY OBVIOUS

The practicality, ease of use, and the advanced directions and commands that voice assistants can now perform and understand have given it a significant advantage in recent years. **Did you know that Amazon Echo skills have increased to 30,000?** The way things are going with voice search, it's pretty safe to say it's here to stay.

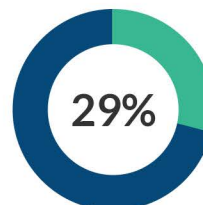
An **Adobe Digital Insights (ADI) survey** found a 4-percent increase in smart speaker ownership since the start of this year, but the bulk of purchases is predicted to take place during the Q4 holiday season, as we might expect.

We can also expect the 4-percent number to rise considerably by the end of 2018!

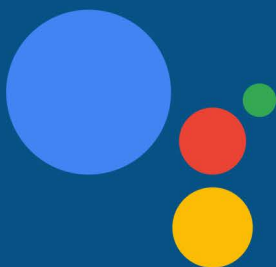
Why would we say this? Because almost a quarter of consumers who don't currently own smart speakers have expressed interest in them. The same ADI survey found 72 percent of smart speaker owners were comfortable using a voice assistant in public, with only 29 percent of non-owners feeling comfortable. This interest in ownership is important, as smart speaker owners are more likely to use a voice assistant across all devices, so usage will naturally become more prevalent. Since users are able to interact with a voice assistant from practically anywhere there's internet access, it's no wonder voice search has become increasingly popular.



of smart speaker owners were comfortable using a voice assistant in public



of non-owners feel comfortable using a voice assistant in public



Google Assistant



Cortana



Alexa



Siri



Bixby

MOST BRANDS KEEP THEIR VOICE ASSISTANTS CLOSE TO HOME

The most common examples of voice assistants are Google Assistant, Cortana from Microsoft, Amazon Alexa, Bixby from Samsung, and Siri from Apple. These assistants can be found in a range of devices, but are often limited to products developed by the brand. Siri, for example, is found in the iPhone family, HomePod smart speakers, and other Apple products. Amazon Alexa, however, has approximately 20,000 different products offering integration.

It's about multiplicity – voice assistants can do much more than just search for stuff on the internet! They can also do a variety of tasks like setting alarms, playing music, controlling smart devices, finding directions while driving, and making calls.

THE REAL GAME-CHANGER IS GOOGLE DUPLEX

In **Google's announcement** they stated,

"Google Duplex, a new technology for conducting natural conversations to carry out 'real world' tasks over the phone."

This technology will allow an assistant to mimic a human voice, easily having conversations with real people. Booking appointments, making restaurant reservations, and asking simple questions can all be performed with this artificial intelligence (AI).

Greg Sterling of **Local Search Association** describes it as,

"...an impressive and very 'natural language' sounding demo."

In a limited test, Google My Business (GMB) is asking business owners via their GMB listing if they will accept calls from the Google Assistant. While this isn't mainstream yet, this feature will most likely roll out to all GMB listings in time.

It will be important for all of us to work with local business owners to help them get comfortable and willing to embrace this technology, as the convenience it brings will probably be the next thing super-empowered consumers expect.

HOW CAN LOCAL BUSINESSES GET FOUND USING VOICE SEARCH?

Search traffic is vital for local businesses.

It's the way to reach a target audience who might not know the business offers services in their area, or is within walking distance of their location. Therefore, it is absolutely essential for businesses to put their website in front of searchers.



With traditional typed searches, many results are shown on-screen, making it easy for the user to choose between multiple options. However, for voice searches this is not the case. Depending on the query, voice searches will typically offer just one or up to a few answers – and this is exactly why it's more important than ever for a business to hit the top spot on Google and other search engines.

So how can local businesses get there? Let's start by exploring some of the techniques local businesses should be examining to prepare for the surge of voice search.

CONTENT OPTIMIZATION IS KEY

There are certain key ways that businesses can start optimizing their content to get found on voice search. Here's some of those:

Use Natural Language

The process of finding and optimizing keywords is always evolving. It's expected that voice search will keep the trend going, leading to adjustments as people typically use longer phrases when speaking. This change, however, leads to plenty of long-tail keyword opportunities for local businesses.

Searches will be more focused on natural language, and will bring additional optimization opportunities for local businesses. In this regard, SEO expert Padraig O'Connor says that "marketers should ensure that their content is written in a language similar to the way people converse and search."

Provide Direct Answers

Many of the queries asked with voice search are in the form of a question. To stand a good chance of ranking for these searches, it's important to provide direct answers. Local businesses should provide clear answers wherever possible, with a focus on local and industry relevance.

Answer Questions in the First Sentence

The SEO blog Backlinko conducted research that found **the typical voice search result is only 29 words long**, indicating a desire for quick and direct answers. This means that answering the question within the first sentence is essential, with any supporting content coming after the answer has been given.

Of course, the surrounding content should be longer and more comprehensive, but individual questions benefit from being concise. According to Matthew Howells-Barby, Director of Acquisition at HubSpot, "Google is likely taking a very similar approach to sourcing voice responses as it does to Featured Snippets."

Create a FAQ Page

FAQs can also be a good fit for voice search, providing quick answers to common questions. Businesses can develop simple FAQ pages, adding new answers as required. Checking analytics data will often uncover queries that can be added to the page.

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REMOVE EXCESSIVE KEYWORDS

It has been standard SEO practice over the years to include an exact match keyword. The combination of RankBrain and voice search, though, has reduced the requirement to optimize in this style. The same study by Backlinko found that few voice search results included the exact match keyword in their title tag. Instead, Google was able to understand user intent and provide results by factoring in past searches, semantic connections, and other factors such as location.

SAY WHAT – KEYWORDS ARE NO LONGER KEY!?

Does this mean that keywords are no longer essential to a great content strategy? In a word – no. Keywords will always be a significant part of content, but the strategy under which the content is written and keyword integration has changed.

Keyword stuffing is absolutely not advised, as it could actually hurt a business' ranking. Instead, keywords should be used sporadically throughout the content and in a natural way, one that flows and is easy for both the user and the search engine to understand.

BUSINESS LISTINGS FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES – GET THEM RIGHT, RIGHT AWAY

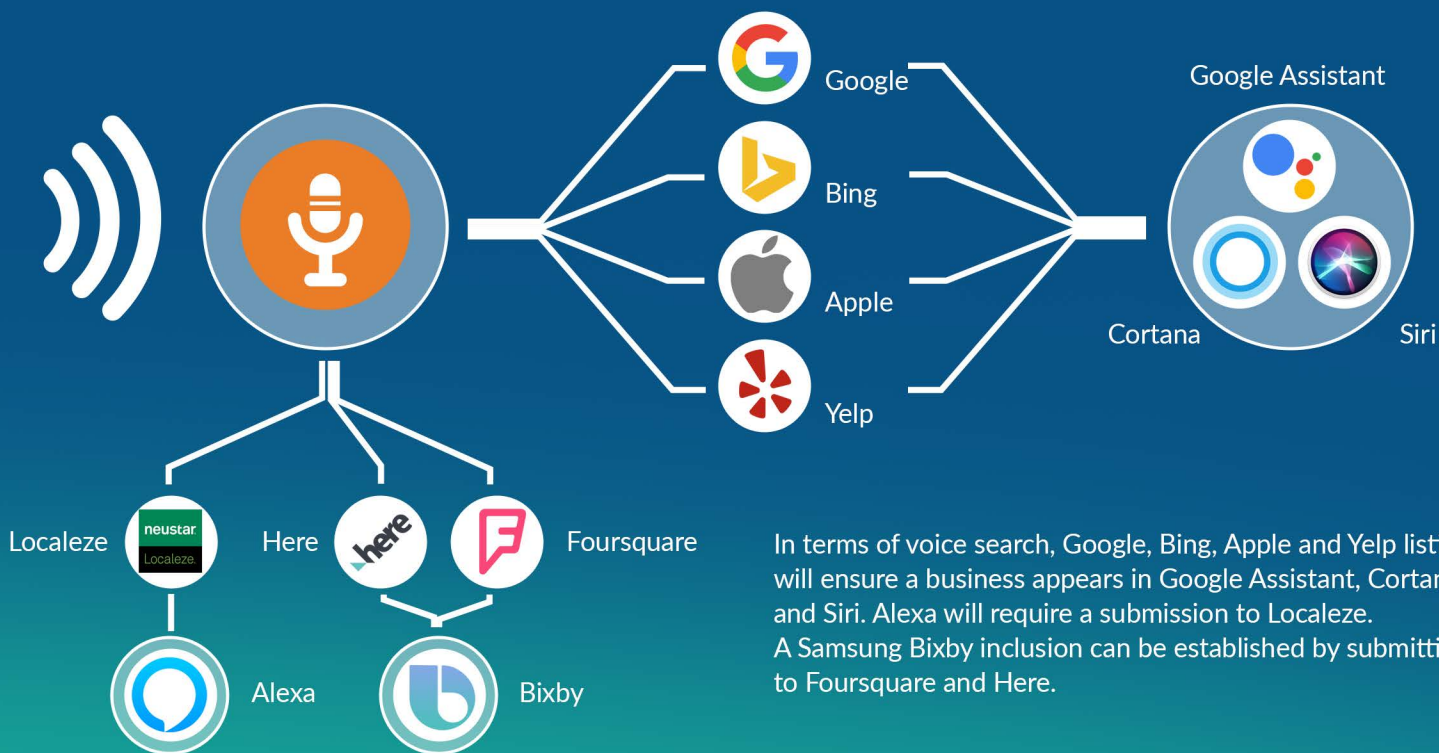
As you know, Google My Business is a vital part of a local online presence. So are Bing and Yelp. But simply claiming a business listing is not enough – ever.



Consistent use of the business' name, address, and phone number (NAP) is indeed essential, but a completed profile will also include a detailed description, reviews, business hours, photos, and any relevant attributes. Each and every field available in the listing should be completed and thoroughly fleshed out.

Google My Business is only one platform among many that local businesses need to target. To ensure consistent local business details appear in Bing, Apple, Yelp, Foursquare, and any other online resource, information should be submitted to the data aggregators – Localeze, Acxiom, Infogroup, and Factual. Aggregators have huge databases that search engines rely upon when providing users with local business details.

PROPAGATING TO VOICE ASSISTANTS STARTS AND ENDS WITH THE DATA



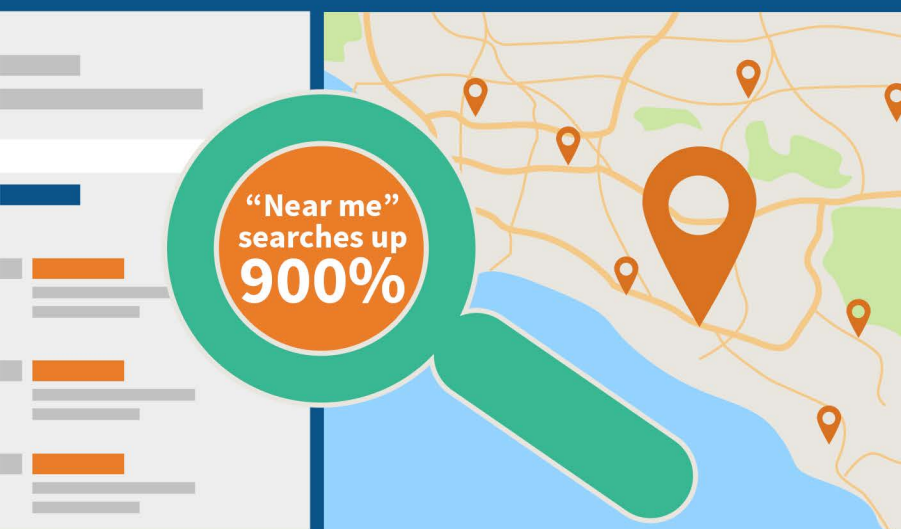
By providing detailed information to all the appropriate platforms, a local business gives itself the best chance of not only appearing in local search engines, but also becoming highly visible for relevant voice search queries.

HOW IMPORTANT IS OPTIMIZATION FOR “NEAR ME” SEARCHES?

Since 2012, Google Trends has shown year-on-year growth for “near me” related searches. Recently, the 2018 Internet Trends Report published by Mary Meeker while at Kleiner Perkins, showed that “near me” searches are up 900 percent from 2015, indicating that users are preferring local businesses.

Google believes that “near me” searches are more complex than ever before. Customers want things right, they want them now, and they want them as close to them as possible! They are not only looking for a local business, they’re also trying to find the nearest location that stocks a specific item at this exact moment – preferably one that is also highly-rated by previous customers.

In order to keep up with potential customers’ demands – and always ahead of the competition – real-time data syndication is essential. Details need to be accurate, with correct opening hours and consistent NAP.



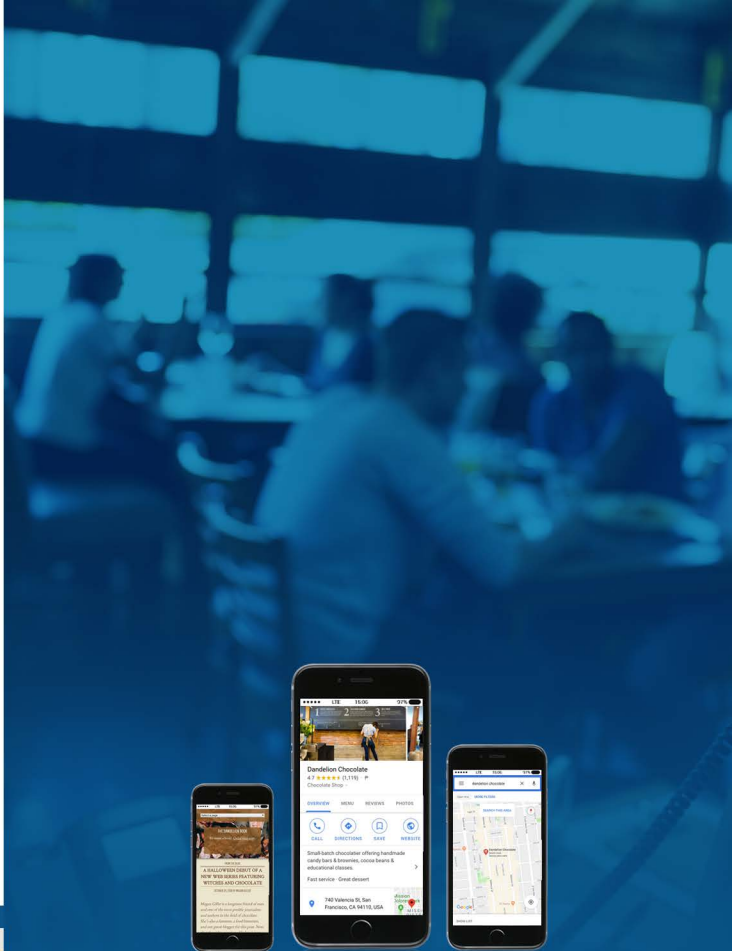
“For me” is 60%



“Should I” is at 65%



Google query growth globally from 2015 to 2017 is eye-opening.



YES, IT'S STILL ALL ABOUT THE NAP



Did you know that 68 percent of consumers would stop using a local business if they found incorrect information in online directories? In addition to NAP and related information, businesses can include details like special offers that will allow voice assistants to provide timely information. Gaining positive reviews is also a necessity, but many customers will not think of offering opinions without prompting. Asking customers and clients for reviews should become part of the sales experience, while making the process as user-friendly as possible.

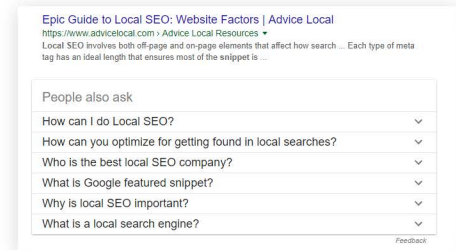
Optimizing for “near me” searches is different from traditional keyword optimization, and here's how. For example, a user is likely to ask a question while on the move such as: “What's the best hair salon near me?” The search engine would use the location of the device and provide results from the available business listings. In this case, a hair salon should optimize their site for their actual location, with the “near me” keyword being a universal signifier of a location search.

HOW CAN FEATURED SNIPPETS HELP A LOCAL BUSINESS GET FOUND IN VOICE SEARCH?

Featured snippets changed the way search engines provided content to consumers. For simple queries, a user could gain quick and concise answers without needing to visit additional websites.

Answer boxes – aka featured snippets – are now playing a big part in voice search. As the technology improves, this is only likely to increase. The voice assistant will read the snippet for any relevant search, so the search engines will be looking for appropriate content to meet the demand.

A business can get their content featured in the prime position by offering the best answers to relevant questions. Many industries will have obvious questions that are always being asked. Some businesses, though, might need to look deeper.



IS IT ABOUT THE INTENT – OR THE CURRENT RANKING?

According to BrightLocal's Jamie Pitman,

"If you want your local business to appear in position 0, you should research and discover the kinds of low-intent questions users ask Google that doesn't currently result in a feature snippet appearing and create website content that satisfies those specific questions."



Research from the SEO company Ahrefs found that 99.58 percent of sites included in a featured snippet also ranked on page one of Google for the search term.

Therefore, it's highly unlikely a page will be promoted if it's not already worthy of a high ranking. The SEO fundamentals will come into play, with page authority, load speed, relevant backlinks, strong content, and effective use of tags all playing their parts.

Yes, voice search has been steadily growing but is still in its infancy, which means now is the perfect time for local businesses to start making the appropriate changes to their strategy. Over the next few years, voice-enabled devices will continue to grow in popularity as users become more comfortable with the technology.

IS THE PAST A PREDICTOR OF THE FUTURE?

In 2015 we were telling everyone they need to mobile-optimize their websites, and today we have a mobile index. Someday we might have a voice index that Google rolls out – you just never know with them. It's based on consumer demand, and more and more consumers will definitely be demanding voice search.

One of the primary uses of voice search has been local search, and that will almost certainly remain popular. Ultimately, local businesses don't need to completely overhaul everything they've been doing, but a few key changes can and will make all the difference.

Get wise, and get a head-start on the competition by including voice search in SEO strategies.



NEXT STEPS

There's no denying the evidence. Everything points to voice ruling search into the foreseeable future. Not only is it convenient and accessible to everyone, it's also practical and easy to use. Any business looking to get found online should already be working on an integral SEO strategy to rank on the top position for voice searches.

The right strategy should include:



Voice search optimization



Citation and listing claiming, optimization, and maintenance



Content optimization

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT. START WITH RUNNING
OUR **FREE ONLINE VISIBILITY REPORT.**

Our report, including our Voice Search Readiness score, will help you to better understand how the businesses you represent stack up against the competition.

