

GUIDE TO LOCAL SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

CREATED BY



powered by search



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Guide to Local Search Engine Optimization:

1. The Local Search Opportunity – Why You can't Afford to Ignore Local SEO
2. How to Claim and Optimize Your Local Business Listings on Google Yahoo and Bing
3. 8 Steps to Building an Optimized Local Business Listing
4. How to Promote and Syndicate Your Local Business Listings
5. How to Enhance Your Websites Search Results with Rich Snippets
6. How to Leverage Sitemaps To Get Ranked in Universal Search
7. Advanced Local Search - Reviews, Citation Sources, and PPC Integration

About the Author



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Dev is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Powered by Search. He has over six years ground level and strategic internet marketing experience in agency and in-house companies. Prior to founding Powered by Search, he worked as channel marketer at Microsoft, SEO and social media marketing strategist at an internet marketing agency, search marketing strategist at OANDA, online marketing director at Publipage, and started an agency that in 2009 was incorporated as Powered by Search.

Dev's search engine optimization, local search, paid search, and conversion rate optimization expertise has seen him work with Fortune 500 and 1000 brands ranging from Microsoft, RE/MAX, Public Storage, Sheridan College, HMV, MTV, Delta Hotels, and The Discovery Channel, as well as many small and medium businesses. His articles and opinions have been widely published and quoted by the Canadian press such as the Globe & Mail, Financial Post, National Post and CTV, as well as industry media publications such as WebProNews, Small Business News, Search Engine Land, Search Engine Journal, SEO Book, and Media Post.

Dev received his Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Marketing and Strategic Management from University of Toronto.

1. The Local Search Opportunity – Why You can't Afford to Ignore Local SEO

The Death of the Yellow Pages

When was the last time you cracked open your phone book to find a local business, such as a plumber, electrician, lawyer, or dentist? Chances are your telephone book is gathering dust, while your customers are actively searching for the services you offer on the Web. They're also searching via their mobile devices, enhanced 411 services such as Google 411, and finding you on a map rather than in a business directory.

Of the 10 billion unique searches conducted each month in the US, an estimated 40% are considered to have 'local intent,' that is, for local services, businesses, and products. Needless to say, if your local business isn't focusing on dominating the local search space, you're leaving money on the table.

Search Is Becoming "Location Aware"

Traditionally, a local search query has always been in the form of:

name of your service area or city + the type of service you offer

For example, you customer may be looking for a "chiropractor in Chicago" or "personal injury attorney Boston." As search algorithms have matured over the years, search engines have become smarter at understanding not only the "local intent" behind a search query, but also where the searcher is located, called "geotargeting." For example, if you now search on Google for the term "sushi", you'll likely find sushi restaurants close to where you live. This technology is especially useful on mobile devices, such as the iPhone and Blackberry.

In order to maximize the chances of your business being visible on local searches, you optimize your website for local search. You'll also want to optimize the business profiles you may have at other websites and local listing profiles on various search engines.

How Do I Get Started in Local Search Optimization?

In this series of local search optimization articles, you'll find in-depth instructions on how to optimize your local search presence from start to finish.

1. How to Optimize your Website for Local Search
2. How to Claim your Local Business Listings on Major Search Engines
3. 10 Steps to Building a Well Optimized Local Business Listing
4. How to Promote and Syndicate Your Local Business Data

5. How to Get Reviews and Citations for Your Local Business

6. How to Purchase Local Pay Per Click Advertising

Local search is the fastest growing area of search today. Aside from offering an excellent return on your both your time and monetary investment, local search leads have proven to bring customers with higher than average intent to purchase your products or hire you for your services.

How Do I Get Started?

The first step in dominating your local SEO opportunities is to determine the state of your existing local business profiles that third party data providers may be aware of. To do this, head over to www.getlisted.org, input your business name and ZIP code, and click “check listings.” Your listing snapshot will provide you a listing score as well as telling you whether you’ve claimed your business profiles on Google, Yahoo, Bing, and Best of the Web Local. As we’ll explain in the next article in this series, claiming your listing is the first step in gaining control of your listings and sending the search engines the right signals to index and rank your profiles properly. Claiming your listings is also the best preventive measure against your listing being hijacked or edited by an unscrupulous competitor.

In summary, you’ve now learned why local SEO is an important component of marketing your small or medium business via search engines and internet yellow page type websites in addition to determining your listing score, or how complete the state of your local business listings are in on different business data providers.

2. How to Claim and Optimize Your Local Business Listings on Google Yahoo and Bing

How to Claim and Optimize Your Local Business Listings on Google, Yahoo, and Bing

In my last article titled *The Local Search Opportunity – Why You can't Afford to Ignore Local SEO*, I covered how critically important it is to have a local search presence for your business. In part two of this continuing series, we'll be covering the first steps towards taking control of your business data, which is also known as the process of 'claiming your listings'.

How Search Engines Gathers Data about Your Local Business

Major search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing rely on 3rd party data providers to source almost all of their local business data. These data providers include aggregation houses such as Axiom and InfoUSA, common Internet Yellow Pages type sites such as Super Pages and Merchant Circle, and social media review sites such as Yelp and iBegin. With such a complex eco-system of local business data, it's important to claim your listings to consolidate all this fragmented business information under a profile that is under your own control.

Claiming your listing is also the best preventive measure against your listing being hijacked by an unscrupulous competitor, misrepresented with inaccurate information, or merged with a competitor's data. It's also the very first step in being able to actually optimize your business listing by hand.

How to Claim Your Listings

You can create your business listing using the following links at the [Google Local Business Center](#), and also for [Bing](#), and [Yahoo](#). Sign up as a user for each of their respective business centers and either search for your business by name and address, or add the business location by following the relevant instructions.

While you're filling out the required business information, ensure that you're using the Doing Business As (DBA) for your business, and that you're maintaining a consistent format for your Name, Address, and Phone Number (NAP). It is important that you fill out this information as accurately as possible to let the search engines know how to find 3rd party business data from other sites and associate it with your business profile. Ensure that you complete your profile as comprehensively as possible, by including the following:

- A keyword rich business description
- Extraneous business information such as Hours of operation, Payments accepted, Services offered, Certifications, Awards, Parking Availability
- The maximum number of business centric images and videos allowed.

When you are ready to verify your information, you will be either contacted via phone with a secret pin code to verify your identity, or a post card will be mailed to your business location. Once you have verified your information, you now control your local business listing.

Best Practices in Claiming Business Listings

- Do not create duplicate business listings when claiming an existing unverified listing.
- Create only one listing for every physical brick and mortar location you have.
- Follow the listing guidelines for each of the major search engine local business centers.
- Do not use call tracking numbers as part of your listing.
- When possible, use a local phone number rather than a toll-free number for additional ranking power.

In my next article I will be going over 8 Steps to Building an Optimized Listing which will include tips and best practices on using images, video, text, and the appropriate keywords to further optimize your business listings.

3. Eight Steps to Building an Optimized Local Business Listing

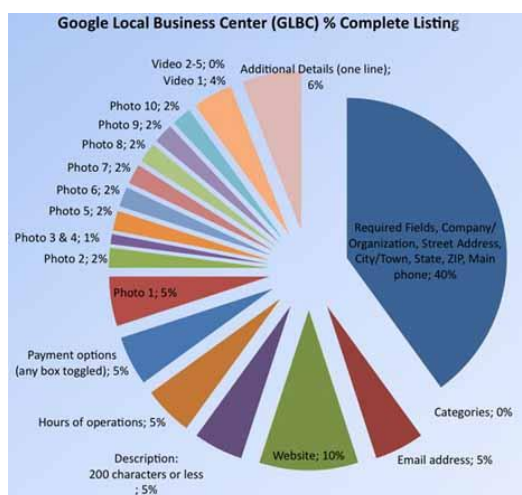
Now that you've claimed your listings and verified them, it's time to optimize them. This article will contain little fluff and lots of actionable advice, so let's get started.

8 Steps to an Optimized Local Listing

Optimizing your Google Places Page (formerly known as Google Local Business Center) listing consists of paying attention to the following steps as you fill out your business profile:

1. Basic Business Information
2. Email, Description, and Website
3. Business Category Selection
4. Service Areas
5. Hours of Operation and Payment Options
6. Images and Videos
7. Additional Details
8. Review and Submitting Your Listing

Profile completeness is a ranking factor within Google's local listings. Profiles that are more complete have better rankings than ones that are less complete, so it's important to fill out the entire business profile.



Nick Thomas of G5 Search Marketing submitted this to Blumenthals.com August 4, 2009.

Step 1: Include Basic Business Information

This includes filling out the required fields such as Country, Company/Organization, Street Address, City/Town, State, ZIP, Main Phone, and Fax numbers.

Make sure you use the actual DBA (Doing Business As) name for your company and that your address information is reflective of your actual address. Fill out the fields as accurately as possible, since Google will attempt to cross-reference them with information from other business databases that mention your company.

Step 2: E-mail, Description, and Address Display Options

1. Use an e-mail address that is associated with your website domain such as info@yourdomain.com
2. Use the 200-character limit in the description to accurately describe your business including product and service areas where possible. The business description should answer the following questions:
 - Who are you?
 - What do you do?
 - Where are you located? Where areas do you cover?
3. Fill in your website details. If you do not have a website, it's best to at least have a one page website freely available through any of the many free website builders.

Step 3: Business Category Selection

Selecting the right categories can make or break your chance at ranking prominently within Google's 7-pack, that is, their list of seven similar businesses and organizations in your area.

Google offers one main category and four related categories to help define your services. Start typing in the main categorization of your business and you'll find that Google Places will suggest a category for you choose. Choose the most appropriate suggestion as your main category and then proceed to fill in related categories or other services your business offers.

In the past, you may have heard that it is a good idea to stuff city or location keywords into your categories. While this was true last year, it is no longer effective and can even be detrimental to your rankings.

If the suggested keywords do not match your business services appropriately, you can use custom categories. Employ this [Blumenthal's Google LBC Categories Preview tool](#) to find synonyms that are recognized by Google Places. For example, identified synonyms for the suggested category "Lawyers" include:

| | |
|------------|-----------|
| attorney | findlaw |
| attorneys | law firm |
| defense | law firms |
| DUI | lawyer |
| family law | pro bono |

Step 4: Service Areas

In recent months, Google Places has offered the option for businesses to define their service areas. This is especially useful, at least in theory, for mobile businesses such as plumbers, roofers, and other contractors, and home-based businesses. Unfortunately, Google Places still places more trust in brick and mortar based businesses than mobile businesses. Our testing has proven that selecting service areas results in a sharp drop in rankings. As per Google Place guidelines however, this is the only way for mobile or home-based business to represent itself on Google Places.

Google Places also offers the option to hide your business address completely, in case you want to keep your business address private.

Step 5: Hours of Operation and Payment Options

Filling these details out accurately will help you get closer to a 100% complete Google Places listing. You can also select split hours in case your business is open at different times during each day.

Step 6: Images and Videos

Adding images and videos not only helps your local business listing become more interactive, it also counts toward a 100% complete listing.

Make use of this option and upload some of your business related photos. They can help your customers get an idea of what to expect when they visit or call you. For example, if you are a real estate agent, you can upload pictures of some of the recent properties that you have sold. **Be sure you upload 10 images to help make your profile complete.**

You can also upload business videos to your local business profile. These can be promotional videos, company messages, and DIY or how-to videos for your customers. Google Places gives you an option to showcase up to five videos. While more videos provide increased interactive content for your customers, only one video contributes towards profile completeness.

Step 7: Additional Details

This section allows you to provide all additional details you wish to tell your customers about your business. You may add multiple fields, but only one is needed to count towards profile completeness. Example fields where you may add appropriate keywords include options such as parking availability, free estimates or quotes, or awards your business may have won.

A rarely known fact is that you can also add links in your local business listing to your Twitter or Facebook pages. Just add a field called “Follow us on Twitter” or “Follow us on Facebook” and copy the full URL for your Facebook or Twitter Profile into the field on the right hand side.

Step 8: Review and Submit Your Listing

Re-check your listing data to check for accuracy, then click the submit button to save your changes. In about an hour or so — and sometimes faster than that — Google Places will have picked up your listing. If you are in a non-competitive market, you may already have a place in the 7-pack of local business results. If you don't show up on the first page don't be discouraged, because in my next article, I'll explain how to building citations or “links to your listings” that can strongly impact your rankings.

4. How to Promote and Syndicate Your Local Business Listings

So you've claimed your listing and can finally find yourself on the major search engines when you search your business name and the city you're located in – But you might be asking yourself “why can't I find myself for <insert city> + <your services> yet?”. One of the reasons your listing doesn't rank is because it does not have enough citation data aggregated via your local business profile, such as your Google Place page.

In order to “get found”, you've got to start building citations to your listing, much like building links to your website for organic SEO rankings. At its core, citations can be of two types, structured and unstructured - The former being 3rd party data providers that the search engines know and trust as business data providers, and the later being any reference to your business' name, phone number, or URL on any given web page recognized by a search engine.

Most citations will at the very least contain the following:

- Your DBA Name
- Business Phone Number
- Business Website URL
- Business Categorization

You may also find citation sources that allow more rich information about your business, such as the ability to include pictures, videos, extended information such as your business hours, and even reviews and customer ratings. All of this extra information will help you rank in local search, so I encourage you to complete your citation profiles to be as complete as possible.

Essentially, citations are the search engine's way of validating the popularity and credibility of your business, especially since it is difficult to fake a business' inclusion in a chamber of commerce, print business directory, or government website.

Web citations come in many forms, but the most common ones include:

- Business Data Syndication Houses such as InfoUSA and Axcion
- Internet Yellow Pages Directories such as Superpages and Merchant Circle
- Review and Rating Directories such as Yelp and TripAdvisor
- Local and National Business Directories such as Brownbook and Praized
- Location Based Services such as FourSquare
- Industry Specific Websites
- Chambers of Commerce or Government Websites

I've compiled a list of the [20 Best Local SEO Citation Sources for the United States](#) for you to use. That being said, you can either choose to build these manually, use an

agency or Local SEO specialist to manage your citation building process, or use a syndication service and business data management service such as [Universal Business Listings](#) or [Localeze](#).


Before you begin building your citations, I have 6 actionable tips to offer you:

1. Always use your Doing Business AS (DBA) name in all your citations.
2. Avoid keyword stuffing or mis-categorization.
3. Do not use call tracking phone numbers in your citations.
4. Use your main website as your primary business website url
5. Do complete all available options related to your business information available at each citation source.
6. Citations take anywhere from 2 weeks to 2 months to show up in your Local business profiles, so patience will be key to your ranking success.

5. How to Enhance Your Website's Search Results with Rich Snippets

Have you ever paid to get an 'enhanced' listing for your business in a Yellow Pages directory or for an online listing? With the introduction of Google 'rich snippets', you can now get an enhanced listing for your business in the Google search results, for free.

Wondering what an enhanced listing with rich snippets may look like? Here's an example:

[The Keg Mansion - Toronto, ON](#)
www.yelp.ca › [Restaurants](#) › [Steakhouses](#)
★★★★★ 58 reviews - Price range: \$\$\$ 
58 Reviews of **The Keg Mansion** "Okay, it's a chain. But we went here for my birthday tonight and had a thoroughly pleasant experience. The atmosphere is ..."


There are many kinds of rich snippets that may apply to your business, but for this post, we'll stick to rich snippet reviews and 'author' markup.

3 Key Benefits of Rich Snippets include:

1. **Enhanced Click Through Rate** – Because your listing stands out compared to your competitors, you'll receive a higher click through rate, sometimes as high as 20-30% higher.
2. **Provide Useful Information** – If testimonials and customer ratings are a prominent part of your business, you can display relevant aggregate customer ratings right on the search results.
3. **Brand Awareness and Retention** – Using the author markup I'll discuss, you can use your own Google+ profile picture or your company logo to brand your search engine results page listing.

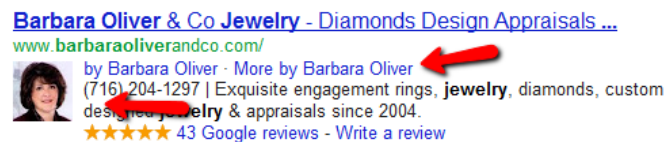
Implementing rich snippets isn't particularly difficult, although it does require some knowledge of HTML. For most of our examples, we will be using a microdata tagging method known as Schema, which essentially tags specific content on your page as a particular type of data – eg: review, recipes, prices, locations etc.

How to Get a Customer's Name to show up in the Search Results

[Toronto SEO & Internet Marketing Company | Powered by Search](#)
www.poweredbysearch.com/
★★★★★ Review by Dr. Kevin McIntyre 
Full service SEO, SEM, Local **Search** and Social Media Services. Google Adwords Certified Partner. Featured in the Globe & Mail and CTV. Get a Quote Today.

1. To avoid the technicalities of learning code, we will be using this [Schema reviews generator](#).
2. Paste the code into your home page, where you usually display testimonials.
3. Test to see whether the code was implemented properly by running the home page URL against Google's Rich Snippets Testing Tool.
4. Wait for your rich snippets to show up in a couple of days.

How to Get a Your Profile Picture or Brand Logo to show up in the Search Results.



1. Setup your Google+ profile page or Google+ brand page.
2. Populate your Google+ profile with your details, including a profile picture.
3. Place a link on your Home Page and your About Us page linking back to your Google+ page in the following format ` We're on Google+`
4. Test your results in the Rich Snippets Testing Tool.
5. Wait for your new authorship data to show up in the search results.

After implementing the above steps your website should experience a noticeable jump in the number of clicks it gets, which in turn results in more leads and sales.

6. How to Leverage Sitemaps To Get Ranked in Universal Search

Sitemaps help search engines discover content on your website which they otherwise may not have come across. Think of a sitemap as your way on knocking on a search engine's door, letting it know of new or updated content on your site.

Adding a sitemap to your website is one of the most basic strategies to get deep content crawled and indexed by search engines. The trouble is, most people only stick to the two most common kinds – HTML based sitemaps, and XML based sitemaps that contain a list of the different URLs on their website.

Sitemaps come in many different flavours and formats and can be very useful at getting everything from rich media content inclusion in universal search to getting your news or press release updates included on Google or Yahoo News.

Let's review the 6 kinds of [sitemaps](#):

HTML Sitemaps – These site maps are the most commonplace, usually a webpage with an index of every other page on your website. Search engines follow these links much like they would from any other web-page on your site.

XML Sitemaps – XML Sitemaps, or machine sitemaps contain more information about your website's urls including information on how frequently they are updated and how each URL is prioritized relative to other's on the same website. This also happens to be the same sitemap format that the major search engine webmaster tools platforms accept.

Image Sitemaps – Want to get included in image search or universal search that features images? One of the best ways to do so is to include an image sitemap. Image sitemaps can also include information on the geo-location of the image, which can help it get indexed on Google earth or on Google maps.

While there are many free generators available online, you can combine the three sitemaps above into one main sitemap using a low cost tool such as the one [available here](#).

Video Sitemaps – Do you have video content that you'd rather have self-hosted rather than on 3rd party sites such as Youtube? If so, then a video sitemap is crucial to getting these videos recognized and even included in universal search results. The Google video extension of the [Sitemap protocol](#) enables you to give Google descriptive information—such as a video's title, description, duration, etc.—that makes it easier for users to find a particular piece of content. Google may use text available on your video's

page rather than the text you supply in the Sitemap's video content, if this differs. Google can crawl Flash SWF objects and the following raw video file types: .mpg, .mpeg, .mp4, .mov, .wmv, .asf, .avi, .ra, .ram, .rm, .flv. All files must be accessible via HTTP.

Here's a handy [video sitemap generator](#) you can use.

News Sitemaps – If you publish local news or run a content website that offers newsworthy information, getting syndicated on major news aggregators such as Google and Yahoo News can drive huge amounts of traffic to your site. If you run your site on a popular platform such as Wordpress, there are [plugins](#) available to make generating a news sitemap easy. Plugins are available [in the wild](#) for other content management systems but you should make sure they follow Google's news sitemap guidelines.

Geo-Sitemaps (KML) – Geo-sitemaps are very useful if you operate or manage a brick and mortar business, or have a chain of franchises. Including a geo-sitemap is useful for your locations to be found on Google Earth and also have a positive effect on Google Places rankings as they add to the 'user content' ranking factors. To generate a Geo-Sitemap use this handy [geo-sitemap generator](#).

7. Advanced Local Search - Reviews, Citation Sources, and PPC Integration

In the final leg of this series of articles on local search optimization I'm going to cover some advanced tips and tricks that will help you as a business owner get a leg up on the competition. Before we begin, let's summarize the 3 most important elements in the local ranking algorithm that make or break your chance at ranking in the 7-pack of local business listings:

- 1) **Citations** – These are the life blood of your listings and act like votes of credibility for your business. Citations are to Local SEO what inbound links are to organic search engine optimization.
- 2) **Reviews** – The search engines are still largely indifferent to the positive or negative sentiment of user reviews on your business listing; however you can be sure that your prospective customers won't be. Having a healthy number of reviews is a definite ranking factor.
- 3) **User Content** – User content refers to the addition of extraneous user generated content such as Google's MyMaps feature to your business listing. You can find user content at the very bottom of your Google Place Page.

Advanced Citation Building

I've got three golden tips for you to build citations that your competitors won't, can't, or don't know exist.

- 1) **Build Off-Beat Citations** – Include your full business name, address, phone number, and URL on as many online sites as possible. Unstructured citations can appear from any web page on the internet that contains this data.
- 2) **Build Citations that Appear as Enhanced Content** – Add pictures to sites such as [Panoramio](#), and consider setting up an inexpensive [webcam as a citation](#).
- 3) **Research and Replicate your Competitor's Citation Profile** – Do this the old fashioned way by using Excel to record all the common citations your competitors have. There is an easier way of course by using nifty tools such as this [local citation finder](#).

Creating a Review Building Program

If your competitors happen to be just as savvy as you are at building the right citations, then it comes down to your business out-servicing and [out-soliciting your customers for the right reviews](#).

Here are 3 tips to remember when creating a review program:

- 1) **Get reviews from as many sources as possible.** This means going well beyond reviews just on Google places, but rather on your other business profiles on sites such as Angieslist, Yelp, Brownbook, MerchantCircle, ShopCity etc. Eventually, these reviews will get scraped by Google Places and will help you rank better.
- 2) **Incentivize reviews and call to actions to leave reviews.** Personally, I don't see a problem in offering a customer a coupon or incentive to leave a review if they had genuinely enjoyed conducting business with you. Adding call to actions or making it easier to add reviews is also another really effective way to increase traction with customers.
- 3) **Respond to Negative Reviews** – Google Places has recently launched a feature which allows business owners to respond to reviews left on their Place page profile. Use this feature wisely and abide by Google's review response policies to keep your place page in good standing.

Integrating PPC with Local SEO

Ever notice PPC ads which also have an address and map associated with them? If you'd like to stand out of the pack in your local service areas, associating your Google Places account with your Adwords campaign is one easy way to boost click thru rates and attract more qualified customers.

To enable this 'ad extension', simple go into your campaign settings and associate your Google places account with the particular campaign you're working on. Have more questions and need answers? Google's own [guides on the topic](#) are here to help.

With that said, I'm bringing the last article in this Local SEO series to a close. It's been a pleasure sharing my learnings about about Local SEO.

Connect with us!

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Google +: plus.google.com/+poweredbysearch

Twitter: [@poweredbysearch](https://twitter.com/poweredbysearch)

Web: poweredbysearch.com

We make search work for you

Powered by search clients enjoy higher leads and a lower cost per lead. See how we can help your business grow.

[Request Free 30 Minute Consultation](#)

