



Beginner's Guide to Local SEO

3 Ways to Rapidly Improve & Grow Your Local Online Presence

WHY YOU NEED SEO TO GROW YOUR ONLINE BUSINESS

A quick Google search of your business proves more than just disappointing— it's outright concerning.

You're not showing up anywhere on the search engine results pages (SERPs) for your keywords. How are you supposed to grow your online business if people aren't able to find you to answer their questions and solve their problems?

Now you need your own answers—

- Why is my business not showing for my searches?
- How can I make it show up without spending a ton of money?
- What should I do to ensure I'm always appearing on the top of the results?

It All Starts with Optimization

SEO stands for search engine optimization. Simply put, SEO is polishing your website and online assets to "rank" on the top of Google (or other search engines) for specific keywords and phrases targeting your niche.

Optimization = Ranking // Ranking = Traffic // Traffic = Sales

Of course, there's more that goes into the buyer's journey than this, but for now, simply think of SEO as free advertising on Google.

Years ago, online queries were desktop driven. But in 2014, Google recognized a shift in search; people were seeking more answers on-the-go. In fact, today:

- 40% of mobile searches have [local intent](#)
- 57% of users say they [won't recommend a business with a poorly-designed mobile site](#)
- 71% of marketers believe [mobile marketing is core to their business](#)

To combat the growing mobile search trend, Google released a search algorithm update called Pigeon, penalizing sites that aren't mobile-friendly. **This update made mobile the new name of the local search game.**

Nowadays, mastering your location-based online presence is one of the most valuable ways to grow your local business.

3 Principles to Get Started

Regardless of the device searchers are using, once you start “organically” ranking (or getting naturally served to the top of the SERPs for your relevant content), you’ll never waste a penny on AdWords again.

You’ll be sitting pretty on page one for your keywords, pooling in online traffic with only minor housekeeping to maintain your shiny, blue-linked crown.

Our Beginner’s Guide will give you a basic understanding of local search engine optimization by introducing you to:

- Google My Business
- On-site Optimization
- Citations & Reviews

These three principles are what you need to start dominating your local online market.

CHAPTER 1

GETTING STARTED WITH GOOGLE MY BUSINESS

People come to you all the time with Google woes, telling you they've read online that you're open till 6 p.m. on Monday when you're actually only open till 5. Or they tell you Google Maps is saying they've arrived at your shop when they're still a block away.

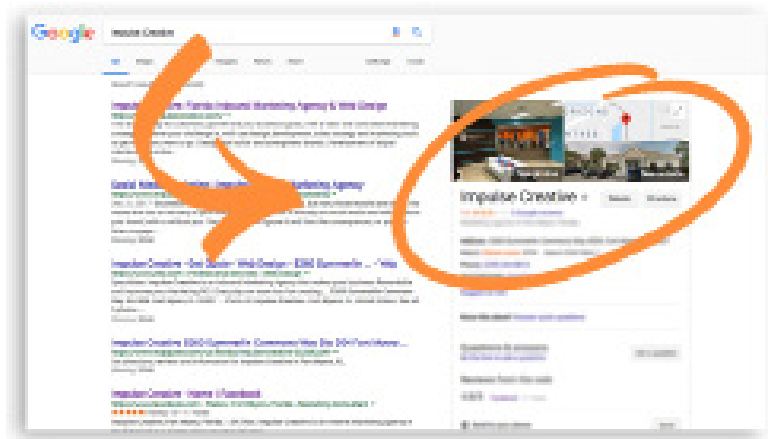
Where is Google getting this information? It's frustrating because you don't know how to tell the world's largest search engine it's wrong. And all your customers take its word as gospel.

That's what the free platform Google My Business (GMB) is for.

Focus on Your Online Presence with Google

Google uses its business platform to serve their "Knowledge Graphs" that appear on the right side of some searches.

The graph is a shortcut— giving searchers the information they need about your business, right at the top of the results page. No clicking and hunting, just instant answers.



Think of Google's knowledge as a free search listing. By filling out your Google My Business profile, you're in control of the first thing searchers see! Especially on mobile, where the graph commands all the attention by eating up the whole screen.

By editing your GMB profile, you gain control of your—

- Company name, address and phone number (NAP)
- Hours
- Directions from Google Maps
- Direct website link
- Pictures of the business
- Reviews

Sometimes these graphs will even include a link to their Wikipedia, their social profiles and a list of businesses “People also search for” that are closely related.

We have some simple instructions for creating or claiming an already existing listing on Google My Business.

Once it’s up, make sure you’re optimizing it for full reach with the following tips!

Google My Business Best Practices

When sprucing up your business listing, be sure to—

- **Stay active on your social networks.** // Google’s Knowledge Graph includes your official website and often your YouTube channel, Google+ or other active profiles.

BIG IDEA: *Create a posting strategy so you can leverage your content across all your social platforms while it’s hot and relevant. Remember, the graph only includes your social links if you’re engaged and pushing out fresh content, so get posting!*

- **Write some Google Posts and maintain an active Google+ page.** // Google Posts are featured snippets inside of your Google Knowledge Graph. Think of it like a status update on Facebook. Hop on each week and tell the world what’s new. Also, remember to actively post on your Google+. Although it’s not the largest social platform, it’s owned by Google and therefore, totally worthwhile for some good ol’ smoozin.

BIG IDEA: *Include a fun picture about a new event, offer, product or announcement. Here’s more on [optimizing your Google My Business profile with Google Posts](#) for additional inspiration.*

- **Use your keywords appropriately.** // Update your business description to include your target keywords. Don’t overstuff and make sure you’re [implementing your keywords in a healthy way across your website](#).

BIG IDEA: *Plan a brainstorming session with your team to discuss phrases you think people are searching around your niche. We’ll discuss this more in the next chapter!*

Don't Forget Google+

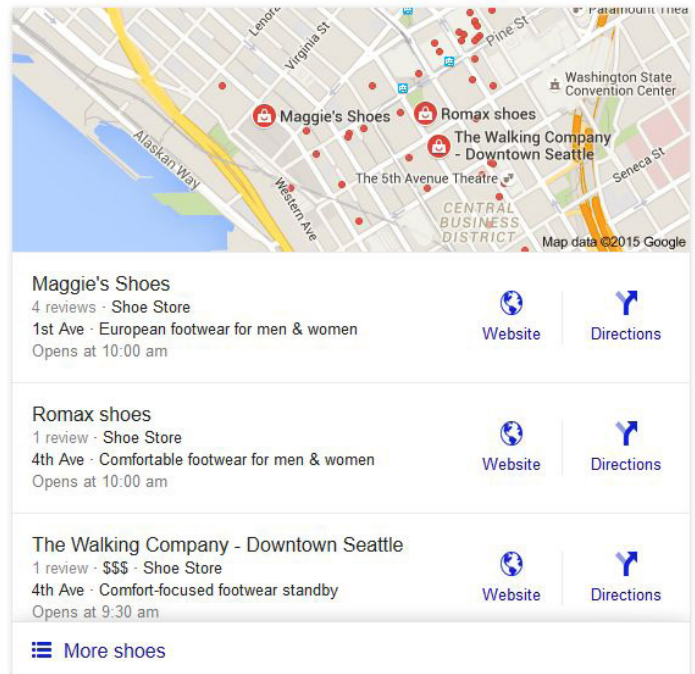
We wouldn't blame you for not considering Google's subpar social platform. It's no secret that it doesn't compare to the social big dogs like Facebook; however, since its owned by the search engine itself, Google+ has a better potential to rank.

Polish your Google+ page by—

- Optimizing your Google+ description and categories with your keywords
- Posting to the platform a few times a week
- Actively engaging for more followers and views
- Facilitating authentic Google reviews

Get a Taste from Google's Snack Pack Too!

We'll discuss the power of reviews in local rankings in Chapter three, but for now, simply understand reviews strongly influence Google's "Snack Pack" and are vital to ranking in the Google+ top three local results.



CHAPTER 2

GETTING STARTED WITH ON-SITE OPTIMIZATION

You have a website and it seems OK. It tells your story and leads users through sales funnels, but it's just not showing up on the SERPs.

Why? Hate to break it to you, but your "OK" website isn't well optimized if it's not ranking for your target keywords.

Your company's site is the one online resource you have full control over. It's your strongest asset for ranking and needs to be strategically optimized to communicate effectively with both users and search engines. Here's some on-site SEO for beginners tips:

Focus on On-Page SEO First

There are a lot of elements that go into optimizing your website for search engines, but a good first step is to review your content.

Sure, there's the code and technical elements, but largest signal to Google of your relevance is what you say on your website. Once you determine how to deliver powerful content for your audience, don't neglect vamping it up for search engines too.

Explore our keyword research recommendations and learn some basic knowledge about web page structure to start optimizing.

Best Practices for Keyword Research

Do you know what you should be ranking for? There's a few different ways to select and optimize around your keywords. Make sure you:

- **Have a keyword brainstorming session.** // Write down some ideas on your own and encourage your team to do the same. These are phrases you think someone might type in to find your business. Focus on addressing a common problem by writing out questions, then think of keywords that are relevant to your niche.

BIG IDEA: Afterwards, commune with your group to compare notes before doing the actual online research.

- **Note helper words and synonyms.** // It's easy to forget semantic words and phrases. Use the list you and your group compiled during your brainstorming session to enter phrases into Google Keyword Planner to generate more ideas.

BIG IDEA: Note competition and bidding prices and shoot for keywords that have more than 500 monthly searches but aren't too pricey or too saturated with lofty rivals.

- **Separate your educational vs. transactional words.** // Explore how people searching for you might be finding you in different stages of the buyer's journey. For example, you might have found the landing page for this content offer by searching for "local SEO." But as you progress past the learning phase, you'll move to a consideration stage. Here, people may be searching "tools for keyword research" and eventually decide to purchase services by looking up "local SEO expert near me."

BIG IDEA: As you research keywords, be mindful of the intent of the searcher along every stage of their buyer's journey. Use your personas to come up with a searcher's keyword trail, mapping out possible queries through the Inbound Marketing phases of Attract, Convert, Close and Delight.

- **Get some clues from Google.** // Search your phrases under Google’s “Incognito” mode to see who is ranking for your target keywords. Click the top results to see what those sites are doing well. Are they using videos, graphics, bullets, headers, etc.? Are they making it easy to get your answers? Back on the SERPs, scroll down to the bottom of the page to see “searches related to” for more keyword ideas.

BIG IDEA: Use Google Suggest to see what the search engine predicts as you start typing in your query. Simply go to Google’s search bar and see what it serves as suggestions after only entering the first word and hitting the spacebar.

- **Creep on your competitors.** // Head over to your competitors’ websites and see what words they’re using by gleaning their page copy across the site. Hop back to their home page and right mouse click to choose “Inspect.” A simple “Command F” search for “meta keywords” might reveal some of their top ranking choices that you can reverse engineer.

BIG IDEA: Add a section for your competitors’ keywords to your own keyword list.

For more information on supercharging your keyword swing, download our [Comprehensive Guide to Keyword Research](#).

Best Practices for Page Structure

Page tags are visual and educational shortcuts for both Google and readers.

See our “Best Practices” header above, for example? You just see big text that signals a new section. But in search engine “HTML” language, that’s an H2 tag (or a Header 2)

In the same way that we read words in English, search engines read in their own language— which is a series of numbers and symbols that string together and form complex code.

Search bots crawl this code script and use the information to assign value to certain text or elements on a page. It’s the code that tells a website to serve title text bigger than the rest of the copy because it’s, well, the title.

In the age of user-friendly website design, no one expects you to be a master coder. But it helps to have a basic understanding of how the most commonly used tags work in order to speak correctly to search engines.

Refer to our chart below to understand each HTML tag and its role—

HTML Page Tags	How To Optimize Using Each Tag
<TITLE>	This is your “papa” tag. It has the potential to shine front and center on the SERPs (69 characters visible and up to 80 total). Each page on your site has a title tag, and it needs to include a single keyword/phrase to avoid competing amongst itself on the search engine results pages.
<A HREF>	These are the blue, clickable hyperlinks on your site that direct visitors elsewhere. They’re used to send users to your other pages or to helpful external sources. The “anchor text” you choose will communicate heavily to Google, so mix in your keywords.
	Each image has “back-end” data attached to it. This text will appear if an image doesn’t load properly and tells both visitors and bots more about the photo. It’s another place to store keywords behind the curtain of your page. Remember, pictures can rank separately on Google Image search!
<H1>	This is your main header tag. Pages can have multiple headers, decreasing in priority or authority the larger the number (H2 has more authority than H3). Much like topic headers on a resume, these header titles introduce sections of content and are shiny keyword gems.
<META DESCRIPTION>	Meta descriptions are previews that reveal what a page is about in the SERPs. Although these short 160 character descriptions aren’t counted as direct ranking factors, search engines will bold keywords mentioned here, making the text stand out to searchers.
<BODY>	This is the meat of your content. Keywords in the body copy need to be thoughtful balanced, not overly exhausted. Stick to about a 5% density, and when in doubt, choose a semantic phrase with similar intent and traffic volumes to avoid keyword stuffing.
 & 	These are tags to bold or italicize keywords, making them stand out from the crowd. Giving certain words emphasis tells both viewers and search engines to give these words special attention.

Think Local

This seems like a real “no shit” statement, but it’s important— so we’re going to pound it hard. If you’re a local business, have your location in mind in everything you do.

From [beefing up your contact or office location pages](#), to making sure your name, phone number and address are consistent, flash your hometown colors brightly but appropriately on your site.

CHAPTER 3

GETTING STARTED WITH CITATIONS & REVIEWS

You've heard that obtaining online citations is helpful for local SEO, but there are dozens of business listing sites, dare say hundreds.

Big Leap recognized a whopping [70 top citation sites for local SEO](#) as staples. And not all of these citation sites simply feature your name, address and phone number (NAP)— some include detailed information about your business and a list of reviews.

These big Yellow Pages-like listings give searchers a way to find and contact you. **But you're off the local radar completely or juggling unkempt listings to say the least.** With dozens of citations, that means a lot of clean-up time and new data entry!

Don't get in too deep yet, let's start small.

Focus on the Top 15 Citation Sites

Search engines need clarity and listings that aren't exact matches become confusing to bots, especially if the old listing's information is straight-up wrong.

Big errors in listings could include an outdated email address or a dead phone line, while smaller obstacles could be inconsistencies in business name abbreviations. In each case, variances in listing data could cause Google to second-guess the right info.

The good news is, you probably already have some of the top citations platforms and they just need a tiny bit of love to clear up any confusion.

According to the optimization gurus at Moz, having listings on these fourteen platforms gives you a good local SEO backbone—

We'd recommend adding Bing Places and Apples Maps to those listings, too!

Lucky for you, [Moz Local](#) offers a comprehensive dashboard to monitor your information across these citation sites.

1. Google+
2. Facebook
3. Foursquare
4. SuperPages
5. Infogroup
6. Localeze
7. Factual
8. City Search
9. Insider Pages
10. Best of the Web
11. HotFrog
12. Acxiom
13. Yelp
14. Yellow Pages

They'll give you a score out of 100 and break down your profiles by four categories (Complete, Incomplete, Inconsistent and Duplicates), saving you hassle and giving you the power to know exactly what needs optimization or deleted.

Best Practices for Getting Reviews

Reviews are a big ranking signal to Google because they reveal how trusted your company is to deliver its product or service. When it comes to online feedback, try to—

- **Naturally facilitate honest reviews.** // This topic is delicate, because Google is smart enough to tell if your reviews are legit. Don't ask a friend to write a phoney review. Search engines want people to naturally rate you and will weed out spammers. If bots miss the fake enthusiasm, searchers sure won't. You're not fooling anyone.

BIG IDEA: Offer customers a small incentive. Consider posting a "Tell us what you think by leaving us a Google review" sign in your shop or creating the same messaging on your website. Instruct them to search your business, click "Write a review" at the bottom of your Knowledge Graph and leave some genuine feedback for a special discount.

- **Reply with mindful discretion.** // Be choosy about how you reply to different reviews. Remember to be brief, but still show you're appreciative that the reviewer invested time to share. Also, avoid being repetitious. Don't just regurgitate what they said or simply say "thank you for sharing!" on all 15 reviews on a listing. Remember that others can see your response, not just the one who left the review, so be mindful of how it would benefit many eyes.

BIG IDEA: Tailor each response to the individual review and be mindful of how you could help foster them throughout the buyer's journey. Offer them a "next-step" whenever possible. If they're a loyal customer, for example, remind them to subscribe to your blog for daily industry updates or if they're expressing uncertainty or difficulty making a decision, send them to supplementary content to nurture them through the funnel.

- **Accountability for mistakes.** // There will be times when the reviewer is biased or difficult to please, but most complaints hold some validity. When the mistakes is yours, be humble and own up. Say “I’m sorry” and remedy their frustration by calling them to discuss or offering them a special deal. Never shift the blame to the reviewer and ensure you set clear expectations on how you’ll handle their news. You want to show that you really care about their opinion, so be honest about the circumstance that caused their bad experience and fix it.

BIG IDEA: *Take negative feedback as an opportunity to learn and make positive improvements. Explain why rectifying these matters will help everyone and be thorough, but empathetic. If the fault was on a staff member, set clear consequences for their mistake, or future blunders, with the whole team. Obviously, some major complaints should be immediately addressed, but for all else, consider holding bi-yearly “review meetings” to make active improvements.*

MOVING FROM BEGINNER TO PROFESSIONAL

Now that you've explored some ways to get started using local SEO to grow your online presence, you're ready to get optimizin'!

As you begin gaining local recognition on the SERPs, you'll soon be wanting more. Grow from being the new kid on the block to a proficient SEO by continuing your knowledge quest.

You just discovered some local ranking basics in this guide, but don't stop there.

Get the Full Low-Down on All Things "Local Ranking" (h3)

Outlined to mimic a cookbook, The Best Google Ranking Casserole Recipe for Local SEO provides detailed directions to make your very own "ranking casserole."



Learn how to combine these ingredients for a concoction so delicious, hungry search engines can't resist.

[Download Your Ranking Cookbook](#)