

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD



Why local search matters.

Think about how you look for information about products and services. When you are looking for a new product or service where do you go?

Sometimes you will ask a friend, neighbor or co-worker, but often you will hop online to find the answers. You are not alone, millions of people conduct a local search online for the things they need and want every single day.

There are billions of pages of content on the internet. When you think about the sheer magnitude of content, it is pretty ambitious for a small business owner to hope to show up on page one of any search but you can if you keep your focus narrow and target a local search result.

Think about a local veterinarian. The doctor probably won't be on page one for the search term: animal clinic, but since most people look for a vet within 3 miles of their home, it doesn't matter. The local vet wants to win searches by customers and prospects nearby.

So how do you win local search? It boils down to three key elements:

*Relevance, Distance
& Prominence*



Relevance

Search engines evaluate relevance based on the words on your website. If you are trying to win “local search” let customers know you are local In addition to your address and a mention on your home page that you are an “Indianapolis-based” company look for ways to include more geographic information in your content.

Mention local events you are promoting, share case studies of local companies using your product and feature employees being active in the community to create more “local” keywords on your website. Also update the meta data and page titles to include the geographic reference.

Expand the relevance of your website by linking variations of your key words and locations in your page titles, descriptions and text. For example on one page you may want to talk about Indianapolis veterinarian services and in another place refer to it as central Indiana animal hospital. Your home page will be unreadable if you try to stuff it with all the different combination of key words, but variety is the spice of life when it comes to your blog. Each blog post gives you a chance to focus on different key words to make your overall website more relevant.

Distance

Google will give preference to locations which are closer to the searcher, particularly when they are searching from mobile devices. So help search engines identify your exact location by making sure your address, city and zip code are clearly listed on your web site.

This contact information, also called a citation should be somewhere in the header section of your web-site, and must be consistent across the web.

In addition to listing your address on your website verify it with Google. This will let you manage how your business information appears across Google, including Search and Maps, using Google My Business—for free.

To get started you will need to create a Gmail account and a G+ page. The next step is to request a Google verification code. You can receive the code through a phone call to the number listed at the location or sent via postcard to prove you actually control the location.

Once verified, it will be easy for Google to identify your location and direct potential customers to you.

Prominence

In the world of the internet, you are judged by what others say about you. Your website is a starting point, but it can't be your only online footprint. Social media is an important second step, but not all the platforms show up directly in search. To make sure you can be found everywhere; expand your listings on directories, like the local Chamber of commerce local search tools like Citysearch, and review sites like Yelp or TripAdvisor.

Stay on top of your listings

Don't leave the listings to chance. While many of these listings are automatically generated they aren't always accurate, especially if you have moved locations. So take time to keep the information current and consistent. Don't let out-of-date information send the wrong signals to search engines or potential customers.

So how do you find all your listings? Start with a search for your business using Google and Bing. You may find a few different results on the smaller search engine. Check the listings for accuracy. Submit change requests to update information accuracy. Submit change requests to update information.

Conduct a second search for your competitors. If they appear in places where you are not listed submit your company information.

Google Loves Reviews

More than ever Google is giving more weight in search rankings to review sites for services and local businesses. Beyond contact information you can enhance your local search listings by soliciting reviews and testimonials.

85% of consumers are more likely to open their wallets when online recommendations support offline advice. Regardless of the industry you are in, take time to request your customers post reviews, comments and testimonials on directories and social media sites. The more information available about your company from independent sources, the more comfortable prospective customers are likely to be picking up the phone to call you.

Start encouraging your clients to leave reviews (good or bad) on these websites to prove to Google you're real and worth a visit!

Get Started

Will these three strategies be enough to guarantee you will win local search? No, but they will help, and not following them will guarantee you remain buried on page three or beyond. Start small, and keep building your local search content.

