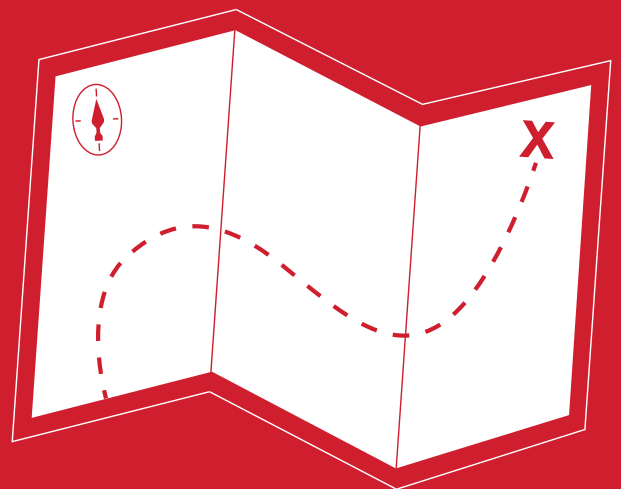


Local Search Marketing

Put your business on the map in local searches when customers are searching for a business like yours.

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Introduction to Local Search Marketing

Did you know that **81 percent** of consumers research products and services online before making a purchase, but they prefer to purchase from a physical store?



of consumers research products and services online before making a purchase

That sets your local business up for success, but only if you know how to use consumer behavior to your advantage.

To get your business in front of those local consumers when they're searching for your products and services, you'll need to build an online presence that helps you be found and chosen. Your digital presence needs to be squeaky clean, consistent and correct across the web.

How can you do that? Well, this is where local search marketing comes in.

In this guide, we'll walk you through building a foundational local SEO strategy that will help put you on the map so that local consumers find you in those crucial purchase-decision moments. You'll learn how to put your business in front of the right consumers at the right time and how to build trust with those consumers, giving you the best chance at being chosen over the competition.

Let's get started.

What Is Local Search Marketing?

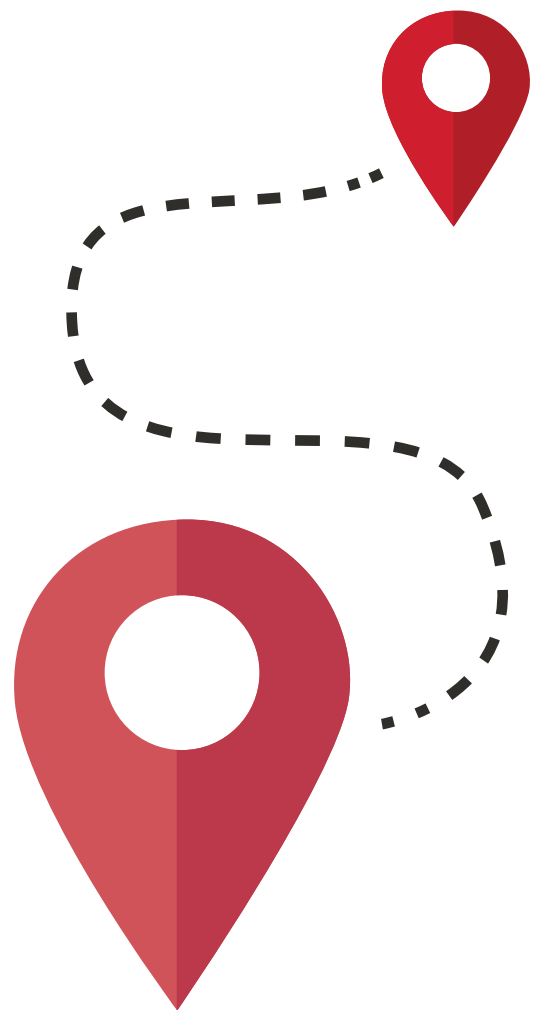
Local search marketing is also known as **local SEO** (search engine optimization). We like to think of local search as a more integrated approach to marketing for local businesses.

For your formal definition, local search marketing is a form of search engine optimization that helps local businesses show up in relevant local searches.

Businesses with at least one storefront (or a service area) need a local search marketing strategy that puts them on the map and helps them be found by more customers online.

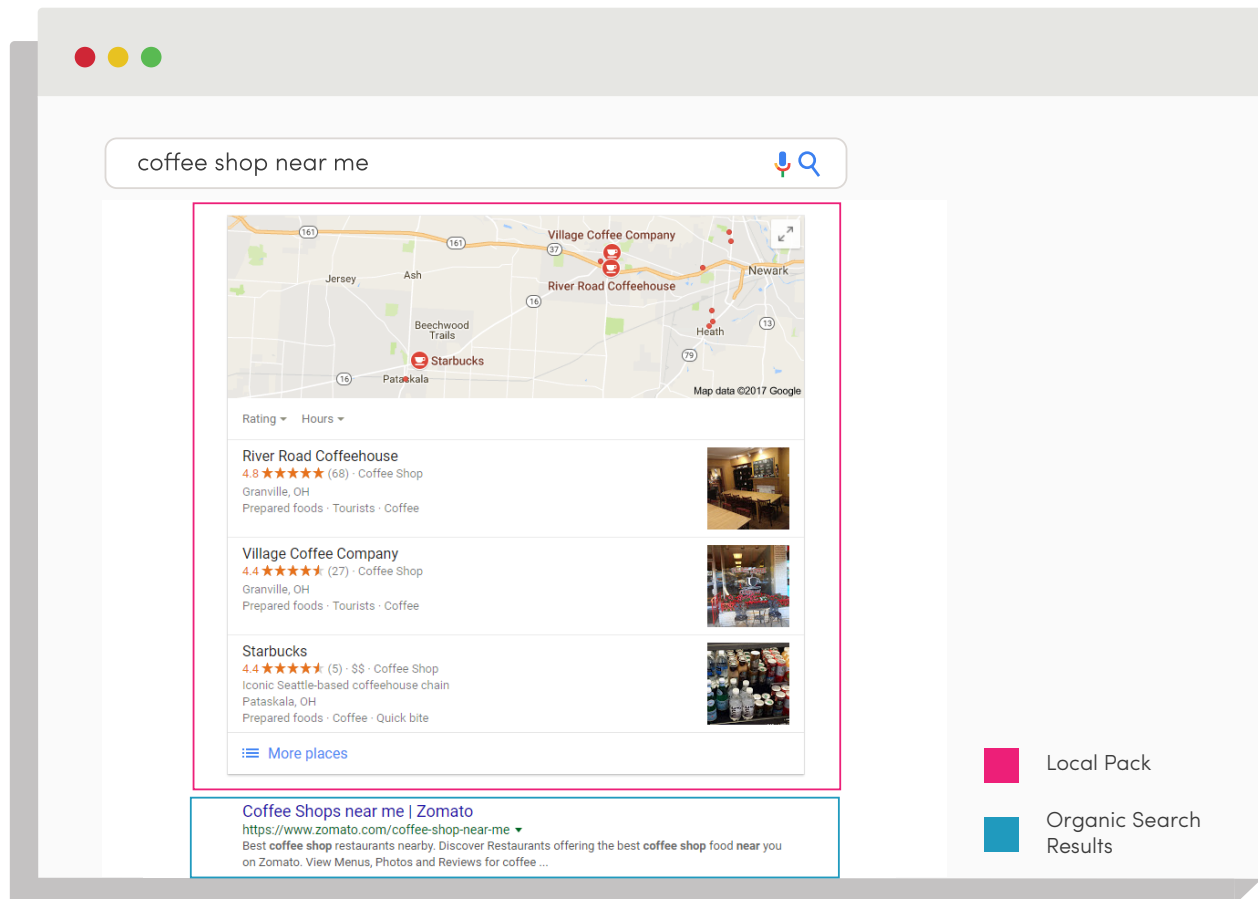
So, if you run a coffee shop in Columbus, Ohio, you want to show up in searches when people Google words related to café, coffee shop, etc. in or around Columbus. And, local search marketing is the strategy that helps you be present in those searches.

And, since **72 percent of consumers who perform a local search visit a store within five miles, building a local search marketing strategy is more important than ever.**



Anatomy of a Local Search

Let's talk about the components of a local search.



As you see in the above search, “coffee shop near me” gives me a local pack (the box at the top) before I see the organic (results that are not locally focused) search results below.

Zomato is the first item listed in the organic search results and the rest continue below, but local search marketing will help you show up above the organic results in the local pack.

How Does Google Rank Your Business in Local Searches?

According to Google's local search document, Google uses prominence, distance and relevance to decide if your business is a good result for a local search.¹

| Prominence

Prominence is all about how well-known your business is. Number of reviews, star rating, inbound links to your website from other websites and amount of directory listings all affect your prominence.

| Distance

Distance is clearly an important factor in local searches. Your business typically won't show up for locally focused searches if the consumer is too far away.

| Relevance

Relevance is hugely important for local searches. Search engines like Google only want to show searchers the best results for their queries.

This is where local search marketing comes in to help you give search engines what they need to know about your business to put you in the right local searches.

But wait; there's more.



According to Moz's list of local search ranking factors, there are eight main categories that affect your business's local search ranking:

1. Google My Business signals
2. External location signals
3. On-page signals
4. Link signals
5. Review signals
6. Social signals
7. Behavioral/mobile signals
8. Personalization

And those eight categories are broken down into many more signals search engines take into account when they rank your business in local searches.²

Industry also plays a role in how long it will take to see results from your local search marketing efforts.

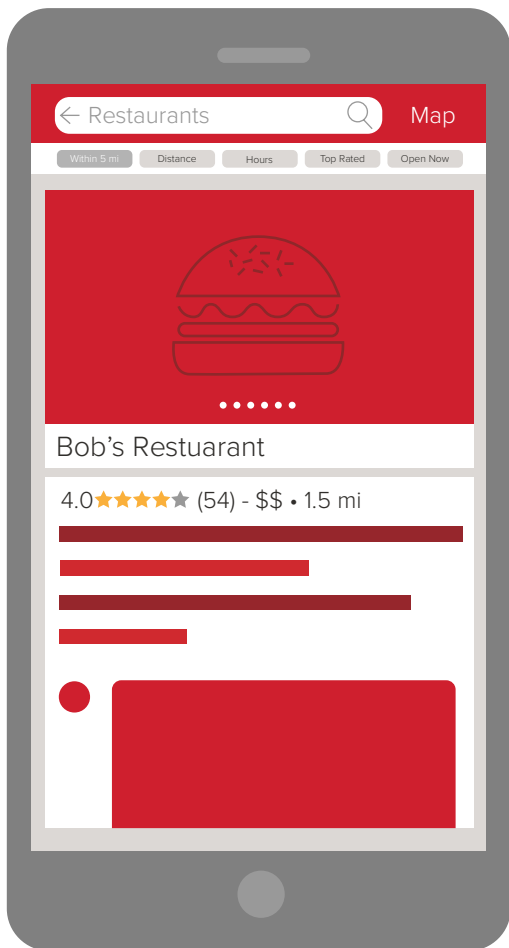
If your business is in a highly competitive industry, it could take even longer to rank in local searches. This is because your competitors are likely already established online and will show up before your business in search results until you can prove to search engines that your business is trustworthy.

How Does Local Search Marketing Work?

When a consumer searches for a local business, the search engine (Google, Bing, Yahoo!) has one goal: to show the searcher the best, most relevant businesses for the search.

So, in order to show up in local searches, you have to show search engines that your business is the right answer for the searcher's query.

How can you do this? You have to provide the search engine with accurate, consistent **NAPU** (name, address, phone number, URL) for starters. But, in order to do this, you need to know exactly where the search engine is getting its information about your business.



Where do search engines get their information?

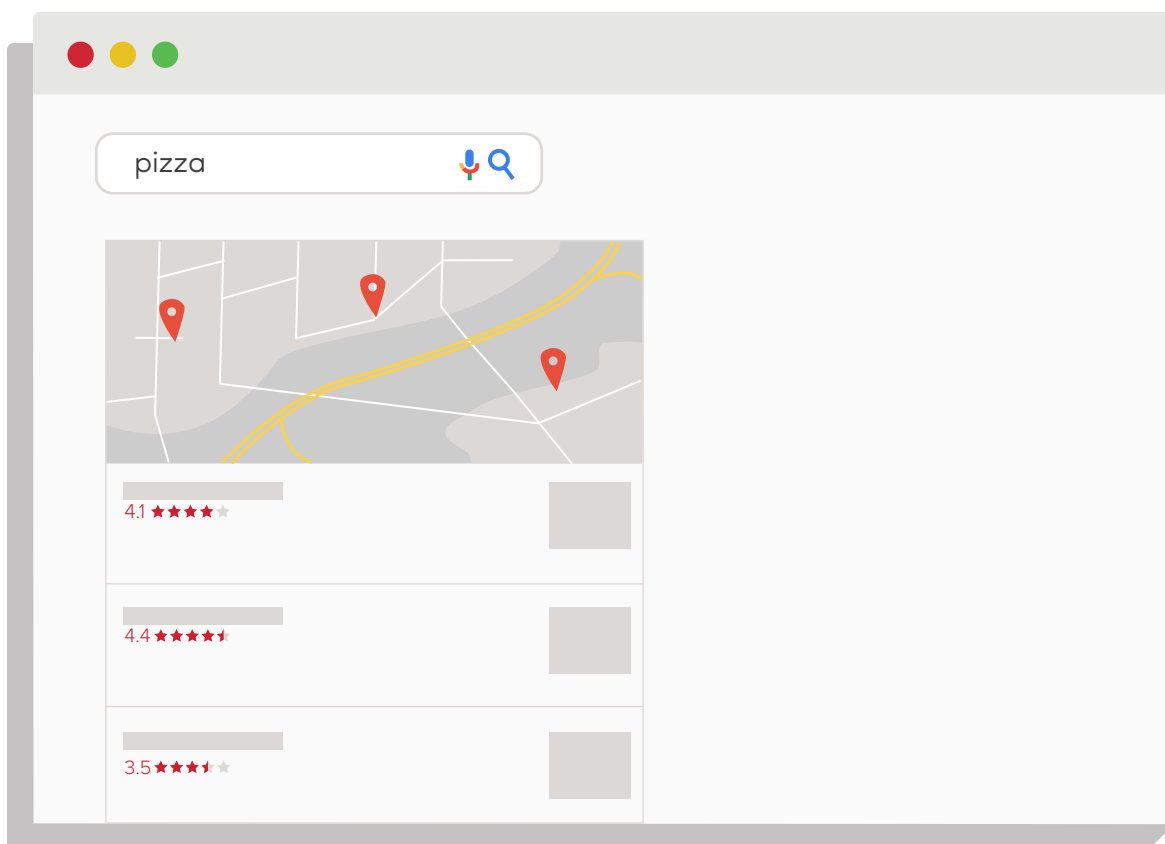
Since search engines take their information from online directories, you'll have to make sure your NAPU is correct and consistent across the most popular online directories.

If your directory information is consistent across various directories, this will show search engines like Google that they can trust your business, which means they'll be more likely to put you in the right searches.

But, if your listings on those directories are inaccurate or inconsistent, the search engine won't know if it can trust your business.

This can hurt your local search ranking, which means consumers probably won't find you when they're searching for the products and services you provide.

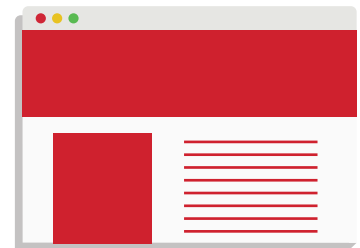
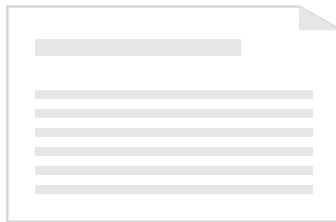
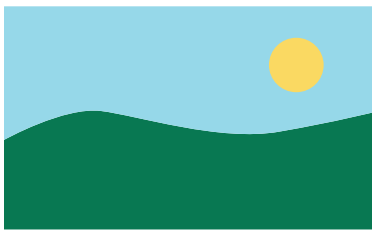
They'll find your competition instead. Ouch.



Where to Start With Local Search Marketing

If your business is new or if you have no online presence, you'll need to create new profiles on the below websites.

But, it's not as simple as plugging a little information into your profile. You also need to add images, a bio and links to your website (and if your business is brand new with no website, then you will also need a website that's optimized for local searches).



If you've been around for a while, you'll need to claim/verify these profiles and then correct or complete the information on the pages. This can take some time, so your best bet is to have the information in a document so you can copy/paste whenever possible.

This will also reduce your chances of typos and errors.

All right, so claim/verify/create pages on these websites:

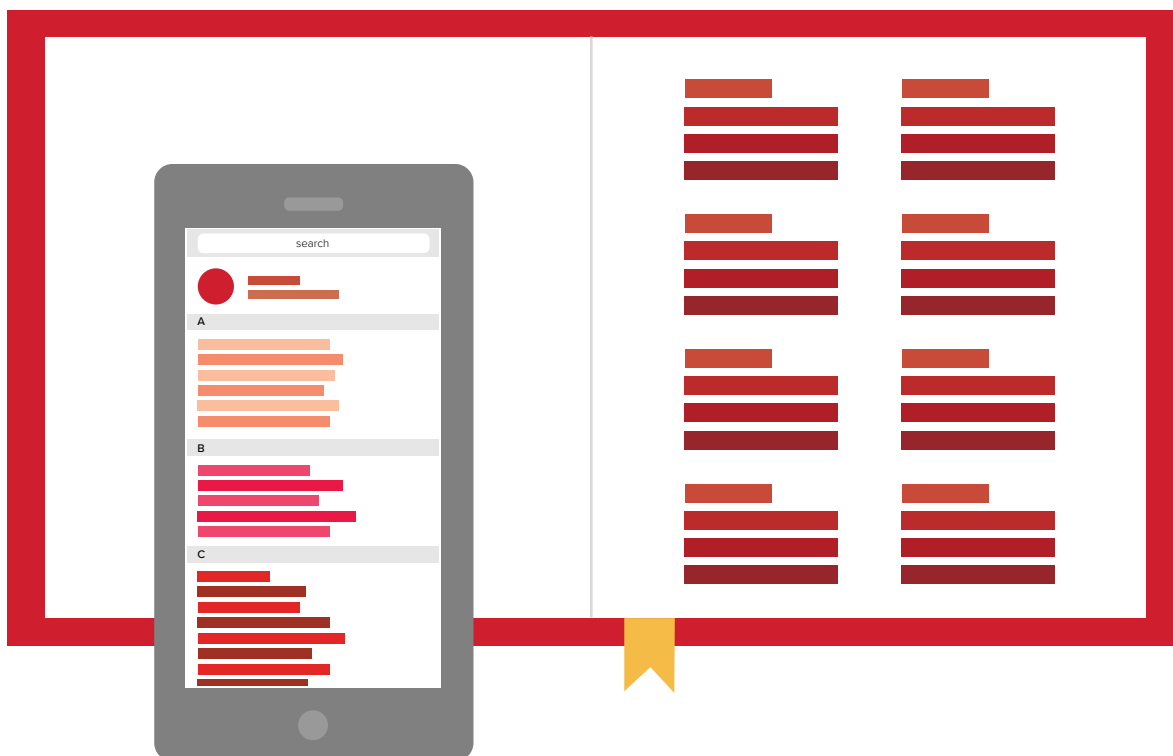
1. Google My Business
2. Bing Places for Business
3. Yahoo!
4. Yelp
5. Facebook

They can all have a big impact on your local search ranking, so make sure your information is correct and consistent across them all.

And remember that Yelp and social media sites like Facebook tend to show up near the top of the organic search results.

Make sure your info is correct on both Facebook and Yelp in case the searcher scans past the local pack and goes straight to your social media or Yelp profiles.

And once you've created or claimed all these local listing pages, you will need to add your information to the big four data aggregators (Localeze, Infogroup, Acxiom and Factual). Data aggregators send information about your business to business directories. And search engines use information from directories to list your business in searches.³



Choosing the Right Business Categories

Claiming business pages on Google My Business and making sure your Facebook profile contains correct information isn't the end.

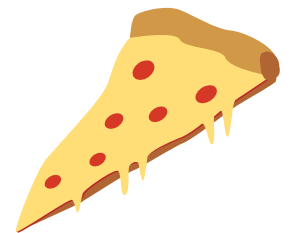
Search engines like Google and Bing don't just take the information you give them as the only truth. Google and Bing get their information from a little bit of everywhere.

That means, if your business's information is different in many directories, that will confuse the search engine, and it won't know where or when to list your business in search results.

But again, this is just a piece of what search engines need to know about your business. They also need to know what category your business belongs to. When choosing categories, be as specific as possible.

For instance, "restaurant" is too general when adding categories to Google My Business. You want to specify what type of restaurant you run.

If you run a pizza delivery restaurant, use the "pizza delivery" category so that Google knows to place your business in "pizza delivery" searches when local consumers are looking.



You need to be specific so that the search engine knows exactly what you do. This will help your business show up in the right searches!

And, don't use hundreds of categories just so you show up in more searches. According to Google's guidelines, you should use as few categories as possible.⁴

How to Audit Your Online Presence

1. Clear your browser history and cache.
2. Open an incognito window and go to Google.com or Bing.com. (We suggest Google since it's the most popular search engine by far.)
3. Search for your industry and city (example: pizza Columbus Ohio). Did your business show up in the search results? If so, were you at the top, or did you have to click “view more” and scroll to the bottom to find your business?
4. Search for your business name and location or phone number (example: RevLocal Granville Ohio).
5. Sort through the directories. Claim, complete and/or correct your NAPU. Some directories are free while you'll have to pay for others.



Step-by-Step Citation Audit and Building

We know that the key to local search marketing success is to give search engines what they need to know about your business (where your business is located, business hours and phone number, etc.).

But, how do you do that?

Well, you're off to a good start by *claiming your Google My Business page*, since that page is **19 percent** of how Google ranks your business in local searches (making it the most important factor on the list).

Next, you'll need to start building citations.

*Citations account for **13 percent** of how Google ranks your business in local searches*, so you need to be building citations in order to show up in the right searches.

13%

Citations account for 13% of how Google ranks your business in local searches

| What Are Citations?

Citations are mentions of your business on other websites, typically directories that feature local businesses. If your business is listed on YellowPages.com, that counts as a citation.

And since search engines use the information they find in your business's citations across the internet to rank you in local searches, citations are

important for your local business. Here's the catch with all this. Search engines will use the information they find in your citations whether or not it's true.

That's why you need to be actively building and correcting your business's citations.

| What Is Citation Building?

Citation building is creating, correcting and completing your business's listings on popular directories so that search engines know which searches your business is relevant for (and so that consumers can find your business in those searches).

If you've ever moved or changed phone numbers, that conflicting information could still be lingering in old citations and showing up when consumers search for your business.



Small things (like a missing or misplaced apostrophe in your business's name) can also mess with your citations, which means they can also have a negative impact on your local search ranking.

That's right. Lack of consistency in citation information can lower your local search ranking, causing your competitors to show up before you when customers are searching for businesses like yours.

Here's a checklist to help you get started building and cleaning up your citations.

Your Citation Building Checklist

- 1. Find the correct address for your business. Check with USPS to see how, exactly, your address is listed.

- 2. Save this information in a spreadsheet or Word document to minimize errors and make citation building a little easier. Now once you need to update your listings, you can copy/paste the information into the directory.

- 3. Search for your business in Google and Google Maps, to find your existing listing and citations.

- 4. Clean up existing citations before you begin creating new citations.
 - To find where your business is listed, search for your business's name and phone number. As you find citations, you'll need to claim or verify your profile and then make sure the information is correct. If not, add your NAPU.
 - And if your business's phone number has ever changed, or if you have multiple phone numbers, you can also search for just your business's name and work your way through those search results to find and clean up your listings.
 - The best thing to do is keep your business's information in a document and copy/paste whenever possible so that the information is consistent.

□ 5. Start building new citations, but be picky! Don't just add a citation to every site out there. Go for the important sites and data aggregators we mentioned.

- For building brand new citations, you can always start with that list of data aggregators we mentioned earlier. Beyond that, you can search for industry-specific or location-specific directories, or even search for your competitors to find out which citation sources list their businesses.
- Here are a couple of resources to find the best citation sources by industry or city:
 - Here's the list of [citation sources by city](#).
 - And the list of [citation sources by industry](#).

□ 6. Optimize listings. Whenever possible, add photos, business information and categories. Don't forget to check for and respond to reviews, and keep listings updated.

□ 7. Keep track of your citations. You can't just build citations once, because one new NAPU mistake somewhere could mean incorrect information in your listings. And you don't want consumers to find incorrect information about your business.

And remember, citation building is just a small piece of the local SEO puzzle, but it's an important piece. If you want your business to be found online, clean up your citations and make sure your business is listed on those important directories.

Optimize for Mobile

82 percent of smartphone users look up information on their phones while they are in a store contemplating a purchase decision.⁵

And, you've probably visited a website on your phone only to leave frustrated because the site wasn't optimized for your device. *But, did you know that while **56 percent** of traffic to the leading websites comes from mobile devices, only **50 percent** of small business websites are optimized for mobile devices?*⁶



|What Is Mobile Optimization?

Mobile optimization means that a website is designed to adapt to the device the consumer is using to search for your business.

Why do small businesses need mobile-optimized websites? Well, both search engines and the people who use mobile devices to search for local businesses favor mobile-optimized websites.

|Mobile-Friendly for Humans

Mobile Internet usage is at **75 percent** and growing. Besides, imagine it from a consumer's standpoint. If I'm on my phone searching for a place to eat near me, and I click a restaurant's website only to find the menu is tiny and the site is difficult to navigate, I'm going to move on to the next business.

I'm not the only one. In a survey, **91 percent** of consumers say they've turned to a business's competitor if the business's website wasn't optimized for mobile devices.⁷

Seriously, mobile optimization is important:

- 56 percent of on-the-go searches have local intent⁸
- 60 percent of consumers use mobile exclusively to make purchase decisions



56 percent of on-the-go searches have local intent⁸



60 percent of consumers use mobile exclusively to make purchase decisions

Mobile optimization isn't just important for consumers. Search engines favor mobile-optimized websites too.

| Mobile-Friendly for Search Engines

So, I know you want your business to rank high in searches. But did you know that search engines will penalize websites if they aren't mobile-friendly? In April 2015, Google updated its search ranking algorithm to reward mobile-friendly websites. Websites that weren't mobile-friendly eventually saw a decrease in search rankings while the mobile-optimized sites tended to see an increase in rankings.

And in May 2016, Google tweaked this algorithm so that mobile-friendly websites got an additional boost in search rankings. And Google and Bing both tell searchers whether or not a website is mobile-friendly in search results on mobile devices.⁹

So, if your website isn't easy for consumers to use on their smartphones, search engines will lower your search ranking, making it harder for consumers to find you.

How does Google define mobile-friendly? Here's the definition from Google's Mobile Terms Glossary:¹⁰

“

Usable on a mobile device

*(e.g. the site doesn't slow down the phone, doesn't scroll horizontally in a vertical orientation, doesn't use unavailable plugins like Flash).
It's designed for the form factor of the device and its display.*

”

Mobile-optimized websites need to have font that is large enough for consumers to read as well as clickable links or buttons spaced far enough apart that users don't have trouble clicking the right button. And there is so much more that Google takes into account when determining if a website is mobile-friendly.

In fact, Google has a list of 25 mobile site design principles.¹¹

And Bing has similar criteria for judging the mobile-friendliness of a page.¹²

Factors include:

- Spacing of links and buttons
- Text size
- Whether or not the page fits the width of the screen
- Device compatibility

Bing and Google both have mobile-friendly testing tools for websites. Just copy and paste your website's URL and click “analyze” to see how your site stacks up.

Google recently updated its [mobile-friendly testing tool](#). You can also [check out Bing's here](#).

Expecting Instant Results? Think Again.

It would be nice if I could tell you that your local search marketing efforts will immediately pay off, but the truth is that local search takes time.

| Here are a few reasons why you might not be seeing instant results.

1. Your business is new and/or there's no information about you online.

Building trust with search engines involves building your online presence with the profiles and citations we mentioned before as well as getting more customer reviews.

2. Your business is established, but there's a lot of incorrect or incomplete information online about you.

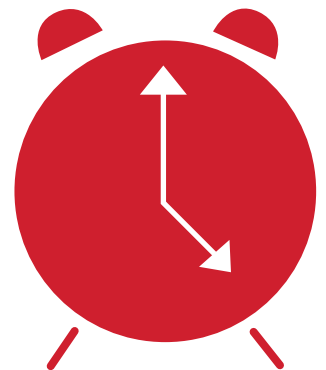
If your business has been around for a while, but you're still having trouble making it to the top of the local search results page, negative factors like incorrect citation information are probably affecting your business.

Ever changed your business name, moved locations or updated phone numbers? You probably have incorrect information floating around.

3. Search engines take a while to catch up.

Once the information has been cleaned up and listings have been optimized, search engines have to catch up.

Google and Bing are smart, but they don't change (or display) your local information the second it's updated in a few directories.



Search engines have to do something called “crawling and indexing” (finding and processing) webpages before they use and display new information from those pages in searches. Even when you submit new information to directories, those directories have to be crawled and indexed before the changes appear in search results.

Even Google My Business takes time. Once you’ve verified your page, it can take a few days before the information you added about your business shows up online.¹³

So, why are you still paying for (or DIYing) local search marketing once all this is done?



Even after all this information is cleaned up, search engines might still find new, incorrect information about your business. And, as we mentioned before, this conflicting information can cause your local search rankings to drop.

Remember, something as simple as an apostrophe in the wrong place can cause citations to be incorrect.

Local search marketing is not something you can do once and reap the rewards.

That’s why it’s helpful to have a digital marketing agency to have your back when things like incorrect NAPUs and negative reviews happen. Not only do you have to continually check that your citation information is correct, but you need to be consistently asking customers for reviews (since reviews are a local search ranking factor as well) and making sure your business has a social presence.

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