

What Is the Customer Journey?

Understand the journey your customers take and what you can do to enhance it!

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Introduction

You know that people go to the store to make purchases, but what if I told you that every customer has their own journey? And no, I don't mean that they get into their vehicles and drive to the store.

The customer journey is the time and process it takes a person to become a customer. Pretty straightforward, right? Well, there's more to it than you might realize.



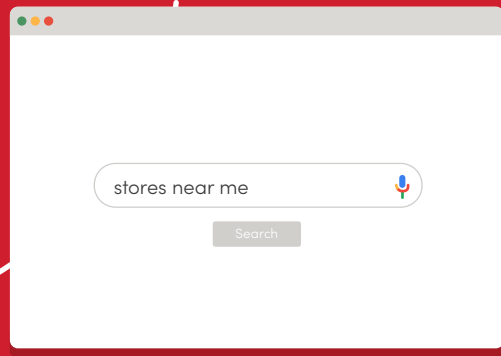
of the customer journey is now completely digital!

In today's digital world, understanding the customer journey is more important than ever before.

Believe it or not, **67 percent** of the customer journey is now completely digital!¹ What does this mean for your business?

This guide is here to break down the different steps of the customer journey and what your business can do to optimize its online presence to nurture your customers throughout their journey.

Let's get started!



What Is the Customer Buying Journey?

Have you ever wondered about the steps that people take before they find, call, visit, schedule an appointment or make a purchase from your business? These steps make up the customer journey.

Every customer journey is different, including how long it takes them to get through their journey, but most of them follow the same path.²

Here are the five steps of the customer journey that people normally take before making a purchase:

1. Use a search engine
2. Use digital maps
3. Visit a business's website
4. Visit other businesses' websites
5. Visit a store or location

As a business owner, it's important to remember that a customer's journey is personal and constructs their view of your business. If you take the time to consider their journey while creating your marketing strategies, it will ultimately create a better experience for your customers.

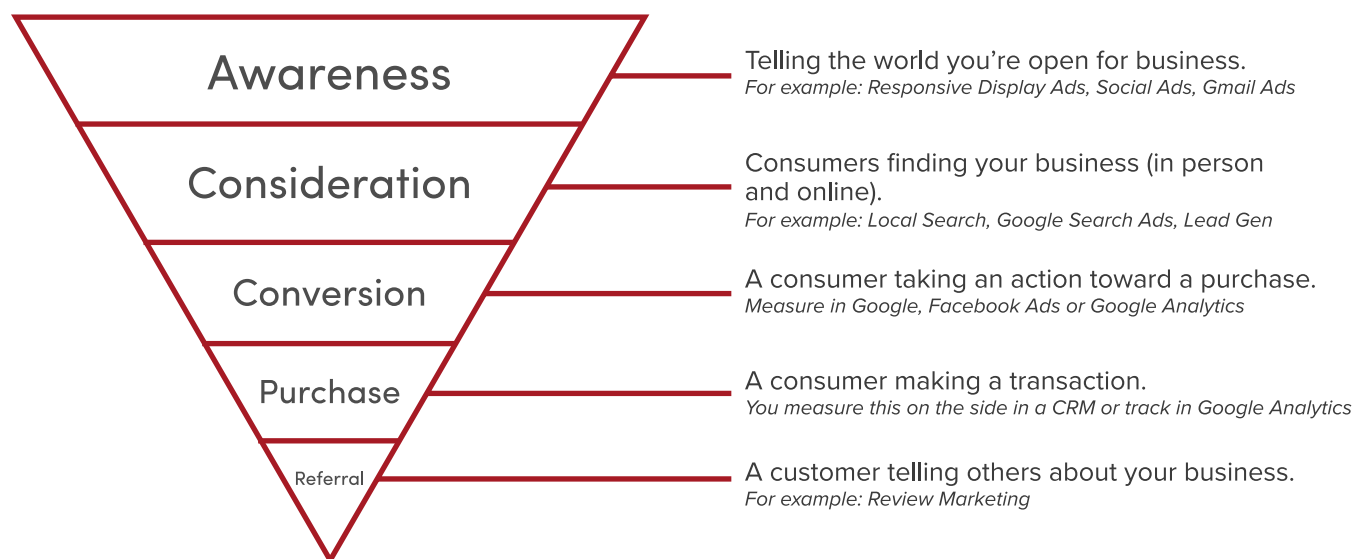
Before we start breaking down the steps of the customer journey, I first want to discuss the marketing funnel and how it directly ties into the customer journey!



The Marketing Funnel

You’ve probably heard of the marketing funnel before, but do you know how it correlates to the customer journey? Think about it like this — the customer journey is a piece of the marketing funnel. Without the funnel, you wouldn’t have the journey.

Ultimately, the marketing funnel is a tool that businesses can use to turn leads into customers.³ The five steps of the marketing funnel are:



The customer journey falls into the middle of the marketing funnel, making it essential for business owners to understand the steps to both.

You know the basics of both the customer journey and the marketing funnel, so now it’s time to start breaking down the customer journey path.

Step 1: Use a Search Engine

This step is the easiest to understand! Once someone realizes they need a product or service, they'll jump online and do a search. Some of the most popular search engines include Google, Bing and Yahoo.

pizza near me



Breaking Down the Search Results

Depending on what a potential customer is looking for when they do a search, there are several search result options that appear for them to choose from. For the sake of this guide, we'll be searching the word *pizza* in Google when conducting searches and providing examples.

There are three different sections that normally appear when doing a Google search.⁴ The first section is **paid advertisements**. This part of the search will appear at the top of the results and will include the word *Ad* next to them!

\$5.99 Domino's® Deal | Choose Any 2 Or More: \$5.99 Ea | dominos.com

Ad www.dominos.com/

Pizza, Pasta, Wings, And More. Order Online & Track it With Domino's® Tracker. Types: Hand Tossed, Thin Crust, Brooklyn Style, Gluten Free Crust, Handmade Pan.

Order Online

Order Your Next Pizza Online
Fast, Easy, and Convenient

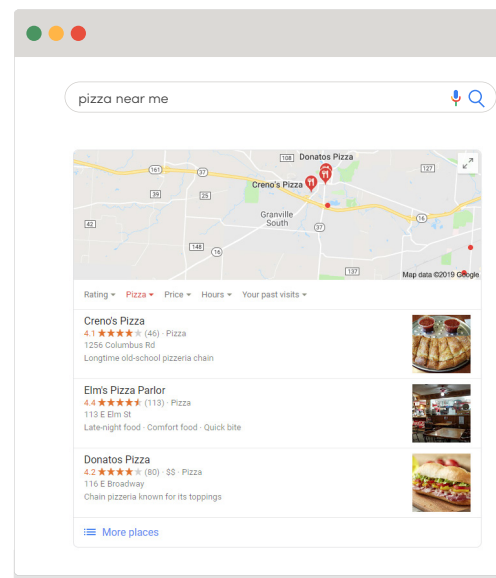
Menu

Browse Our Entire Menu Online
Pizza, Sandwiches, Wings, & More

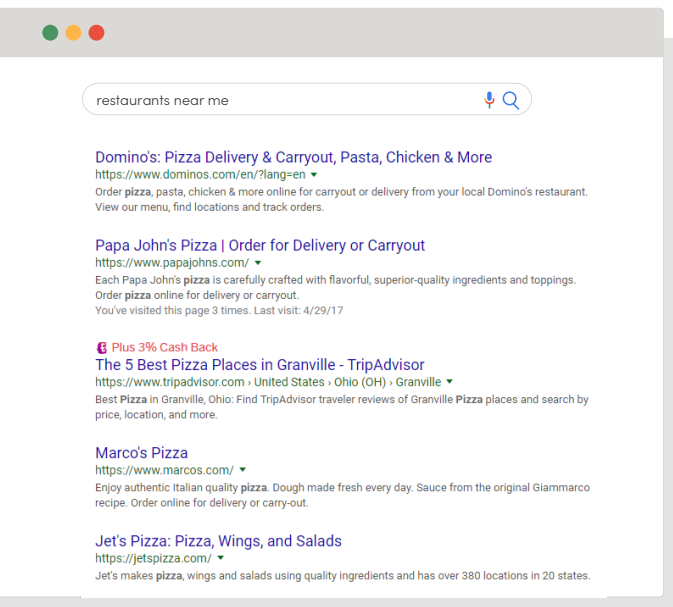
It's important to note that businesses must pay to make sure they're the very first result showing at the top of the page.

Next, your customers will see the **local search results** section, which is often referred to as the Map and Pushpin section (this relates to step two).

These results are based on many different factors, including the location of the business and their star-rating. The local results section



is a great way to find a business regardless of where you're currently located.



The third section, **organic search results**, make up the rest of the results page. The links that appear here are websites that contain content that is related to your search, but it doesn't have to be location specific.

It's not only important to understand the different sections of the search results, but it's crucial to know how your business is appearing in the results!

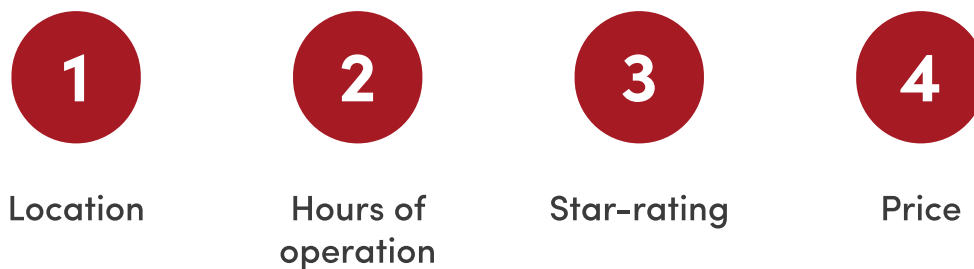
Ultimately, you need to consider your business's goals before deciding where you want to appear in the search results.

Local search is one of the best ways to get in front of potential customers, but if you aren't appearing in this section of the results, then people may choose your competitor over you.

Step 2: Use Digital Maps

After doing a Google search, your potential customer will start looking at the digital maps. They normally can see the top three businesses within the local search section (refer to step one) or they can click on the *Maps* tab and view several more businesses.

Here are some things people will start to look for when viewing digital maps and comparing them to other businesses:



With **90 percent** of smartphone users searching for location information, this step is extremely important for businesses!⁵

While these digital maps give only brief snapshots of businesses, sometimes this information is enough for the searcher to decide whether they want to choose a business or not.

For example, if someone wants to order pizza for lunch and the closest pizza shop doesn't open until 5:00 PM, then they'll skip over that business. If your business does appear on the digital map and you are open during lunchtime, it's likely they will choose you.



90% of smartphone users search for location information, which makes using digital maps extremely important for businesses!⁵

The same situation could happen with location, star-rating and price. These few factors help potential customers narrow down their search before moving on to step three.

Step 3: Visit a Business's Website

At this point, your potential customer has done a Google search and looked at the digital maps to decide which businesses to further research. Now it's time for them to start visiting different websites for the products or services they're looking for.

Think of it like this — your website is your digital storefront. When people visit your physical business location, you want your storefront to look inviting and appealing, right? You should strive for the same appeal for your business's online presence, too!

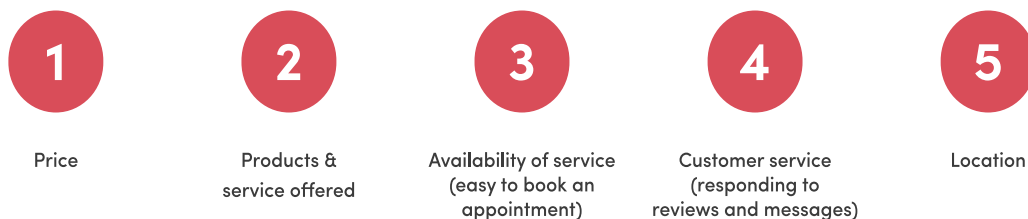
And you may be surprised to know that **81 percent** of shoppers conduct online research before making a purchase.⁶



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Because potential customers have so much information at their fingertips, they want to know as much about your business as possible.

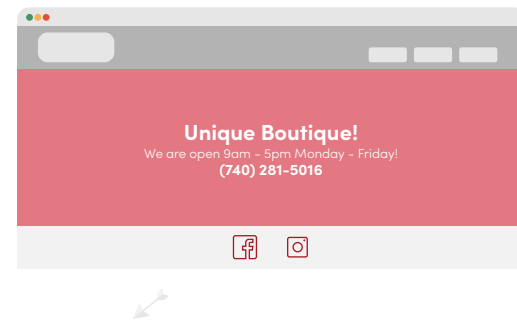
When a potential customer visits your website during the customer journey, they'll look for these things first:



However, there is some secondary information that ultimately helps them make their buying decision. Here's what they'll be looking for:

- Coupons or offers (**39 percent** of shoppers will consider using a business if coupons or offers are available)⁷

- Helpful content (about page, history, etc.)
- Reviews (good, bad and if any are recent)
- Photos and videos (how many there are and the quality)

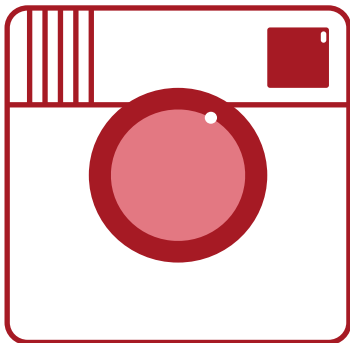


There's also some secondary information that ultimately helps them make their buying decision.

Sometimes they'll find your social media channels before they even find your website, which makes it important to make sure your business is posting and engaging consistently on your social channels.

Not only will they look at your social media, but they'll ask their friends and family for recommendations after looking at reviews. Word of mouth is still valuable to most people, so don't count this form of marketing out.

One of the biggest mistakes that business owners tend to make is that they think potential customers will find their business without the help of a search engine.



It's important to remember that your customers have control and are pretty internet-savvy nowadays, making it essential that your business has an internet presence and an optimized website.

Another important tip for your website is to make sure you have clear branding, that way people can recognize your business if they see your branding elsewhere.

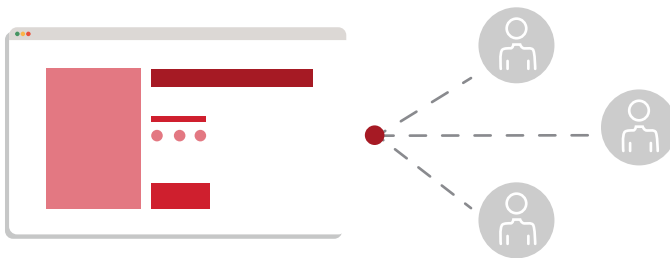
Whether your business's website is the first thing potential customers see or it's the final touchpoint before they give you a call or get driving directions, it needs to have all necessary information to lead your potential customer's decision-making.

If you were a potential customer, what would *you* want to see on a business's website? If you put yourself in your customers' shoes, you'll be able to create content for your website that people will find helpful and valuable enough to choose your business.

Step 4: Visit Other Businesses' Websites

Perhaps a potential customer didn't find what they were looking for on your website or it wasn't exactly what they needed. The next step they'll take is looking at other businesses' websites.

Similar to what they looked at on your site, they'll also look at content, reviews, photos and more on other sites. This is still the research stage of the customer journey, so they want to find the perfect product or service and not settle on the first business they come across.



Ninety-five percent of buyers prefer brands that provide content throughout the buying process, which means that they'll most likely choose a business if they have valuable content on their website.⁸

If your business is new or you notice you aren't getting as much traffic to your website as you should, don't worry! As the digital world continues to transform, so should your business's website.

My number one tip that you should follow is to look at what your competitors are doing. Ask yourself these questions as you're researching your competitors online:

- What makes them different?
- Would I want to choose this business?
- Is their website appealing and professional?
- Do they use branding throughout their website?
- Why do customers choose this business?
- Do they have coupon codes or offers on their website?

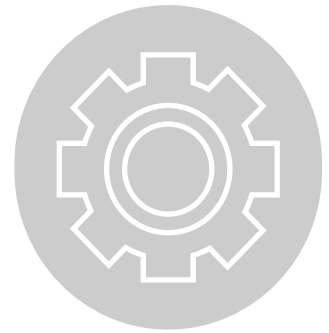
As you're analyzing different websites, make sure to take notes on what you liked and didn't like, but also what you already know your customers like. While it's great to look at different ideas from competitors, make sure you keep a balance. You should always make changes to your website based on your business's brand. Don't be the business that looks like a copycat!

Step 5: Visit a Store or Location

We've made it to the last step of the customer journey! Your potential customer has done an online search, researched your business and chosen you instead of your competitors! Now it's time for them to visit your business in person.

If you're currently utilizing a local search plan, you may be wondering how you can track conversions if you have a brick-and mortar business.⁹ It's simple — just ask! However, don't settle for a simple response like "online," because that isn't specific enough.

If you want to track your conversions based on your current digital marketing efforts, you need to find out exactly how they found your business. You can ask if they found you through a search engine (and which one), social media (which platform), Yelp, billboard, phone book or any other forms of marketing you're doing. To sum it up, if they found you online, ask for the website or app they used and how they got to that website.



After you've figured out how they found your business, you want to keep track of what they're telling you so you can determine your Return on Investment (ROI). Here's what you should be tracking:



- How they found you
- If they researched your business (and if so, where?)
- How much they spent
- How much you spent on marketing or advertising for that platform

Because you won't see instant results with tracking your offline conversions, you'll need to track your conversions

for a few months before deciding what's working and what isn't working with your digital marketing.

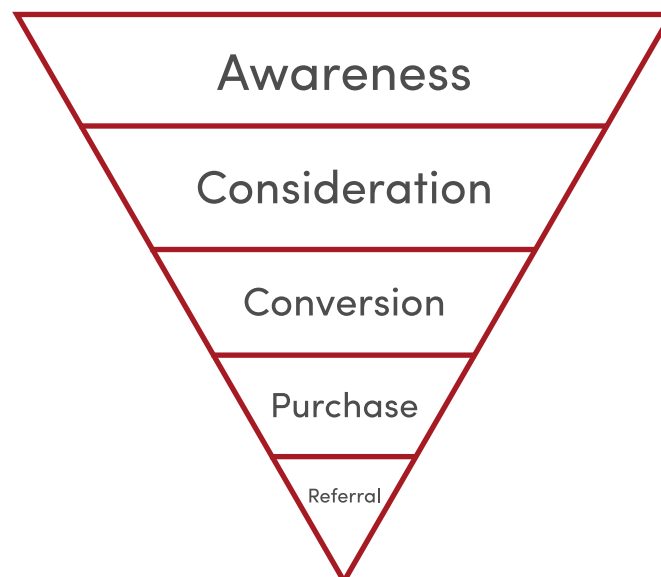
Keep in mind that their experience doesn't necessarily end after they visit your store or make a purchase. Think back to the marketing funnel and remember that **referral** is the last step. If they liked your product, customer service, etc., they'll probably tell their friends or leave a review for your business. If something was misleading or the product wasn't up their standards, they may not consider using your business again, and may even leave a negative review.



Their entire experience and interaction with your business is part of the customer journey and marketing funnel. You must nurture your customers throughout the entire process! Pay attention to all positive and negative experiences, as this could influence whether others choose your business as well.

A customer doesn't think about their journey until something goes wrong; they just go through the process normally and don't think of it in steps. Overall, the customer journey and marketing funnel are tools for business owners to help enhance the experience. If you know what step your customer is in, the better experience you can give them!

As a reminder, below are the five steps of the marketing funnel (refer to page six for more information):





Examples of Customer Journeys

I mentioned in the beginning of this guide that every customer journey takes a different amount of time depending on a variety of factors. So, what are the different timelines that people tend to follow during their journeys? There are three traditional options:

Short

Short term journeys are typically need/want items that are quickly and easily attainable, such as ordering a pizza. When a customer orders a pizza, it typically takes an hour at most. A person will go online, do a quick Google search, look at a couple websites to decide what looks appealing and then place an order.



Whether they pick up the pizza or have it delivered, that's still a part of the customer journey! If you think the journey is complete after the customer has the pizza in their hands, you would be wrong. Eating the pizza is still considered part of the journey, as they could like or dislike the pizza, giving them a reason to leave a review or give someone a referral to your business (step five of the marketing funnel).

Medium

The best way to explain a medium-length customer journey is to think about retail and clothing; a customer needs something, but not immediately. Perhaps someone is in the market for new outfits. Although they could purchase the first piece of clothing



they like, they'll most likely browse other stores or online to look at different options and price points.

At max, this timeline lasts a few weeks to a couple months. With medium-length journeys, you should really start nurturing potential customers by following up or retargeting them after they've visited your website.

Long

Customer journeys that tend to have long timelines are normally large investments, including building or purchasing a home, buying a car, choosing a college, etc. This is anything that you cannot immediately purchase or decide upon and requires extensive research.

Long-term journeys could take anywhere from a couple months to years depending on what stage of the marketing funnel you are in.





Why You Need a Local and Mobile-Friendly Website

We've successfully made it through the five steps of the customer journey! That's wasn't so hard, right?

Although it wasn't hard for you to read through and understand the steps, if you don't have locally optimized and mobile-friendly website, your customers may have a difficult time during their journey.

Imagine this — you drive past a business that you were interested in, but you don't have time to stop. You do a Google search to look up the business, but you can't find it at first. You keep looking and looking, and, at last, you finally find it! You get to the website and it's running slow and the screen is too wide for your phone screen. You're probably annoyed. I would be, too!



Here's how Google defines mobile-friendly:

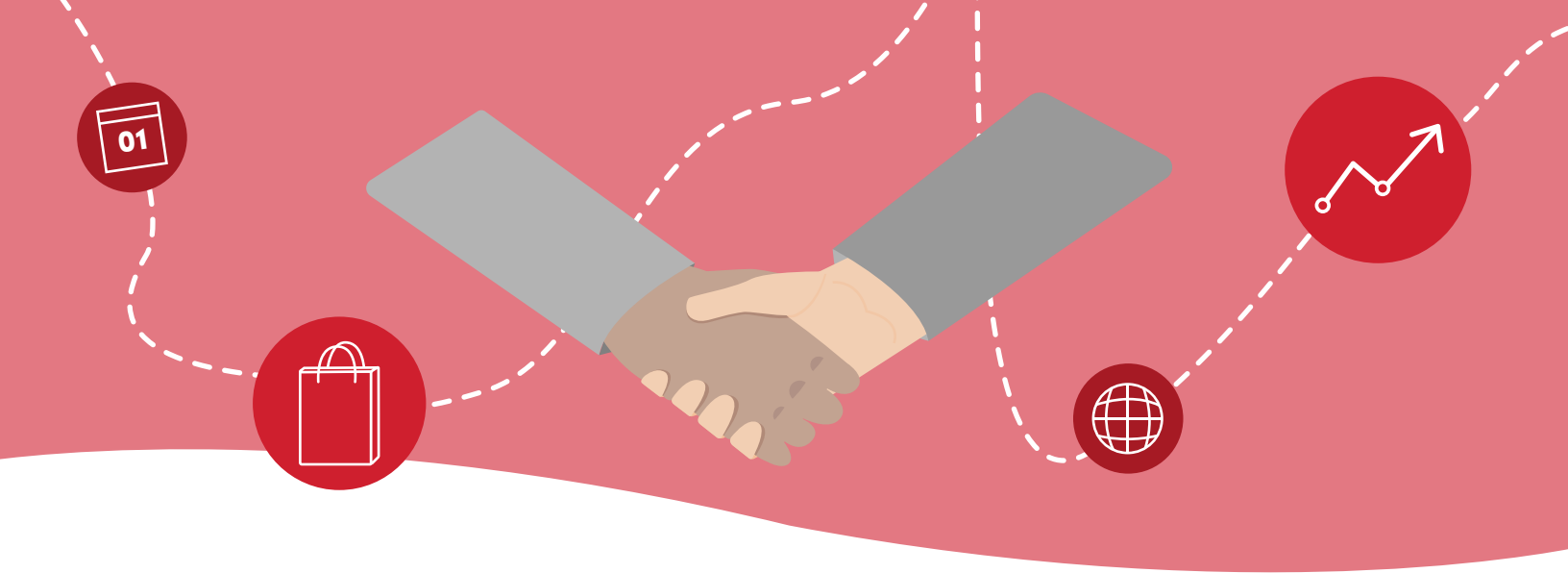
Usable on a mobile device (e.g. the site doesn't slow down the phone, doesn't scroll horizontally in a vertical orientation, doesn't use unavailable plugins like Flash). It's designed for the form factor of the device and its display.¹¹

So many people use their smartphones nowadays to do online searches, so if your website isn't optimized for mobile, it's likely that your potential customers may get frustrated and leave your website. In fact, **91 percent** of people said they've turned to a business's competitor if the business's website wasn't mobile-friendly.¹⁰ Yikes!

Having a mobile-friendly website is essential, but it needs to be locally optimized, too!

Fifty-six percent of on-the-go searches have local intent.¹² So not only are they looking up businesses on their phone while out-and-about, but they'll also looking for local businesses (like you!).

If your business isn't showing up when someone on your street is searching for you, it means that you're not showing up in your local search results. When your website is locally optimized, it's designed to help you appear in the local search results as well as help potential customers choose your business. When your business is in the local search results, it better helps during steps three through five in the customer journey.



Final Thoughts

Thanks for taking a journey through this guide! The main takeaway that I want you to get from this guide is that the customer journey is an important experience not only for your customers, but for your business, too! They may not realize they're taking a journey, but you can make the experience a great one!

And remember, every customer journey is different. It can differ from the person, business, industry or even what time of year. Analyze your specific business's customers and decide how you can better enhance the customer journey.

Good luck!

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