A Beginner’s Guide to

Google My Business
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What is Local SEO?

Local SEO is search engine optimization for local marketing. It’s the practice of optimizing your website to be crawled and indexed by search engine bots called crawlers to be found by nearby customers in search engine result pages (also known as SERP).
Local SEO is unique in that it takes into account the searcher’s proximity to their desired result. For example, searching for best dentist near me will produce a list of highly-rated dentist’s offices within a few miles of your approximate location.

Google prioritizes local businesses in the results for local searches like these in a SERP feature called Map Pack.

Getting to the top of Google may seem impossible for local business owners, but if your business has a physical location, you already have an advantage over purely online businesses.

To optimize your business listing for local SEO, first, you need to understand the three main ranking factors that Google uses for local search. Once you understand how rankings are determined we’ll walk through each step of showing up in local search.
How Google determines local search rankings.

The details of how Google calculates local search rankings are kept fairly quiet, but according to Google there are three major factors businesses should focus on when optimizing for local search.

1. **Relevance**
The goal of Google’s local search algorithm is to connect searchers with answers. So when they search for a nearby tire shop, they get the best recommendations. Making sure your Google My Business listing is accurate and up-to-date guarantees that potential customers looking for a business like yours will find you instead of a competitor who’s not open, for example.

2. **Distance**
The proximity of the searcher to your business is another major factor Google takes into account when determining local search rankings. Because of this, it is important to include your address and other relevant contact information in your Google My Business listing and other directories across the internet.

3. **Prominence**
Finally, Google takes into account the prominence of your business. What they mean by prominence is “how well is this business known”. Prominence also factors in things like directory listings, and online reviews. According to Google “both a business’ overall star rating and the number of reviews are used to determine local search rankings.”
SEO is too hard and completely unpredictable. At least that seems to be the prevailing theory for a lot of business owners. But it doesn’t have to be hard or complicated, especially for a local business. Contrary to popular belief, you don’t need to understand meta tags, link juice, or latent semantic index keywords to succeed with Local SEO.

Believe it or not, you don’t need an SEO strategy to improve your local SEO and start getting found in more search results. You just need to make a few updates to your Google My Business listing. Below is a local SEO checklist to help you follow each piece step-by-step.

**Google My Business Listing Checklist**

- Add complete information to your Google My Business listing
- Verify your locations
- Keep your hours accurate and up-to-date
- Manage and respond to reviews
- Add high-quality photos
1. Add Complete Info to Your Google My Business Listing

According to Google, “businesses with complete and accurate information are easier to match with the right searches.” So, if your GMB listing is incomplete, or worse, non-existent, then it’s harder for search engines to match your business with local customers on Google.

Creating a Google My Business listing is just the first step. Once your listing is created, you’ll need to add as much information as possible. Don’t worry about adding specific keywords, just make your profile as complete as possible.
Potential customers want to know who you are, where you are, and when they can visit you. So before you get started, make sure you have all of your basic business information at your fingertips.

- **Who You Are**
  - Name
  - Website
  - Business Description
  - Category
  - Attributes
  - Opening Date
  - Photos
- **Where You Are**
  - Address
  - Service Area
- **When They Can Visit You**
  - Hours of Operation
  - Holiday Hours

**Consistency Counts**

Your business name, address, and phone number (commonly referred to as NAP) must be consistent across the web so customers, and crawlers, can identify your business.

Inconsistent NAP information is one of the **leading causes of a poor local search ranking**. So if your address ends with “lane,” make sure it’s either always abbreviated or always spelled out.
2. Verify Your Locations

Before your Google My Business listing appears in Search and Maps it must be verified. Verifying your listing is a simple process and Google offers a few different ways to do it.

**On Your Computer**

STEP 1 - Go to [https://www.google.com/business](https://www.google.com/business)
STEP 2 - Sign in to your Google Account, or create one, then, click Next
STEP 3 - Enter your business’ or chain’s address and create or claim your listing
STEP 4 - Fill out basic information about your business
STEP 5 - Submit for verification.

**On Your Smartphone**

STEP 1 - On your phone or tablet, open the My Business app.
STEP 2 - Sign in to the Google Account associated with your business
STEP 3 - Enter your business address and create or claim your listing
STEP 4 - Fill out basic information about your business
STEP 5 - Submit for verification

*You can also use Google Maps to add or claim your business on both desktop and mobile.*

3. Keep Hours Accurate and Up-to-Date

It’s also important to include accurate, up-to-date hours of operation in your listing. Make sure that you include special holiday hours, to avoid frustrating customers who make their way to your business only to find out you are closed.
Businesses that want to improve their local SEO ranking should collect and manage online reviews. Moz estimates that your Google My Business listing and Google Reviews account for 40% of local pack ranking factors.

Online reviews will not only bolster your local SEO but will help build trust with customers and potential customers. When your customers are happy, they help influence others. If you make it easy for customers to leave a review, you’ll get more reviews which will directly impact your local SEO.

“We are dominating local search and local reviews because of what Podium has done for us. We love Podium, and to be honest I can’t stop talking about it.”

Brian Morgan, Owner, Austin’s Couch Potatoes

Sometimes it can be difficult for businesses to collect online reviews organically, so they need to take a more proactive approach. Below are some tips that will increase the odds of getting a customer to leave a review.
5. Add High-Quality Photos

Once the verification process is complete, you can begin optimizing your listing. You should start by uploading high-quality photos.

Pictures help tell a visual story about your business and let customers know what it’s like to do business with you. Photos are also important for attracting attention to your listing—helping you garner more clicks.

According to Google, listings with photos receive 42% more requests for driving directions and 35% more clicks to their website. There are several types of photos you can upload, but at the very minimum you should include:

- Profile photo
- Logo
- Cover photo

Before uploading any photo, make sure the size is optimized for the platform.

Regularly sharing high-quality photos will show off your business’ personality and help you engage with your audience.
Claim to Fame

As promised, this guide to local SEO was super simple. While it might seem basic to fill out your Google My Business listing to get found by Google, 44% of local businesses haven’t even claimed their listing. An incomplete listing means showing up in less local search results, which means fewer customers and fewer reviews.

While some industries are more competitive than others, any business can benefit from updating their GMB listing. If this guide was more of a review for your business check out these deeper dives into local SEO from Moz, Mangools, and Neil Patel.