LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING

The Marketing Guide for Local Businesses

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- *The Ultimate List of Local Online Directories*

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LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING

Each November we're reminded to pause and think about those things that we are truly thankful for.

Aside from the traditonal things, such as family and health, we have many things to be thankful for, and we don't take them for granted.

We're thankful for our valued clients!

We're thankful that you find value in this magazine!

We're thankful for the number of client referalls we receive!

We're thankful that the services we provide help our clients grow their business.

We're thankful for you! If you aren't yet one of our clients, we look forward to the day we can count you as part of our business family.

If you have any comments about this issue or would like us to help you with your marketing please do not hesitate to contact us.

Regards,
David Akers
President / CEO
LMS Solutions, Inc.

Inside This Month's Issue

A Little About Us

Local Business Marketing Magazine is proudly provided by LMS Solutions, Inc.

LMS Solutions was developed to give businesses of all sizes the ability to leverage the same cutting-edge marketing platforms that the Fortune 500 organizations use, at extremely affordable rates.

We offer an extensive catalog of cutting-edge Local Online, Mobile, Social, Pay-Per-Click, Video, Web and Direct Marketing Media Programs. Whether you're a small business, large business or an ad agency, our programs can help you find greater success.

If you are a small advertising agency, or an independent marketing consultant, you're a perfect candidate for our LMS Solutions Partner Program. Find out more by visiting our website.

LMS Solutions is a proud member of:

Did you know that we are a full-service ad agency? Did you also know that we specialize in helping small and medium sized businesses? We customize a program that meets the needs and budgets of each of our clients, and we offer Free Initial Consultations. Give us a call to learn how we've helped businesses like yours grow revenue:

- Mobile Marketing
- Web Services
- Reputation Management
- Video Marketing
- Outdoor Marketing

- Online Marketing
- Social Media Marketing
- Direct Mail
- Email Marketing
- Graphic Design

If you have any questions, or would like to know how we can help you meet and exceed you marketing goals, please contact us.

(484) 893-4055
www.LMSsuccess.com

Marketing Calendar

Plan your marketing messages around these upcoming holidays and proclamations.

NOVEMBER

American & National Diabetes Month
American Indian Heritage Month
Diabetic Eye Disease Month
Epilepsy Awareness Month
Lung Cancer Awareness Month
National Alzheimer's Disease Month
National COPD Month
National Peanut Butter Lovers Month
National Pet Cancer Awareness Month
Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month

November 4 - Election Day (USA)
November 11 - Veteran's Day (USA), Remembrance Day (Canada, Ireland, UK)
November 27 - Thanksgiving (USA)
November 29 - Small Business Saturday
November 30 - Cyber Sunday, St. Andrew Day (UK)

2nd - Daylight Saving Time Ends
3rd - Sandwich Day
4th - National Candy Day
5th - National Doughnut Day
6th - National Men Make Dinner Day
8th - National Cappuccino Day
10th - Marine Corps Birthday
11th - National Sundae Day
14th - National Pickle Day
15th - National Philanthropy Day
16th - National Fast Food Day
18th - Mickey Mouse Birthday
26th - National Cake Day
28th - Black Friday
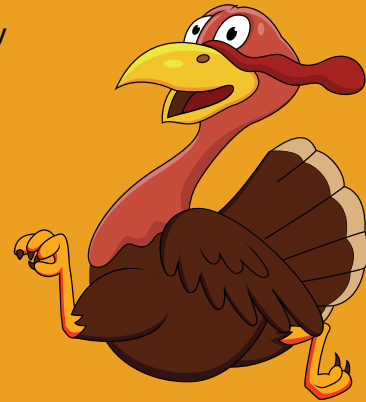
DECEMBER

World AIDS Month
National Write A Business Plan Month
National Tie Month
Tomato and Winter Squash Month
Universal Human Rights Month
Worldwide Food Service Safety Month

December 17th-24th - Chanukah
December 26th-January 1st - Kwanzaa

1st - Cyber Monday
2nd - National Mutt Day
2nd- Special Education Day
3rd - International Day of Persons With Disabilities
4th - National Cookie Day
4th - World Wildlife Conservation Day
5th - National Salesperson Day
6th - Bartender Appreciation Day
7th - National Pearl Harbor Rememberance Day
7th - National Cotton Candy Day

10th - Human Rights Day
12th - National Ugly Christmas Sweater Day
13th - Day of the Horse
15th - Bill of Rights Day
16th - National Chocolate Covered Anything Day
17th - Wright Brothers Day
18th - Answer The Telephone Like Buddy The Elf Day
18th - Free Shipping Day
18th - National Re-gifting Day
21st - Crossword Puzzle Day
21st - Humbug Day
21st - World Peace Day/Winter Solstice
23rd - Festivus
24th - Christmas Eve
25th - Christmas
26th - National Whiner's Day
28th - Endangered Species Act Day
28th & 29th - National Chocolate Day
30th - Bacon Day
31st - Make Up Your Mind Day
31st - New Years Eve
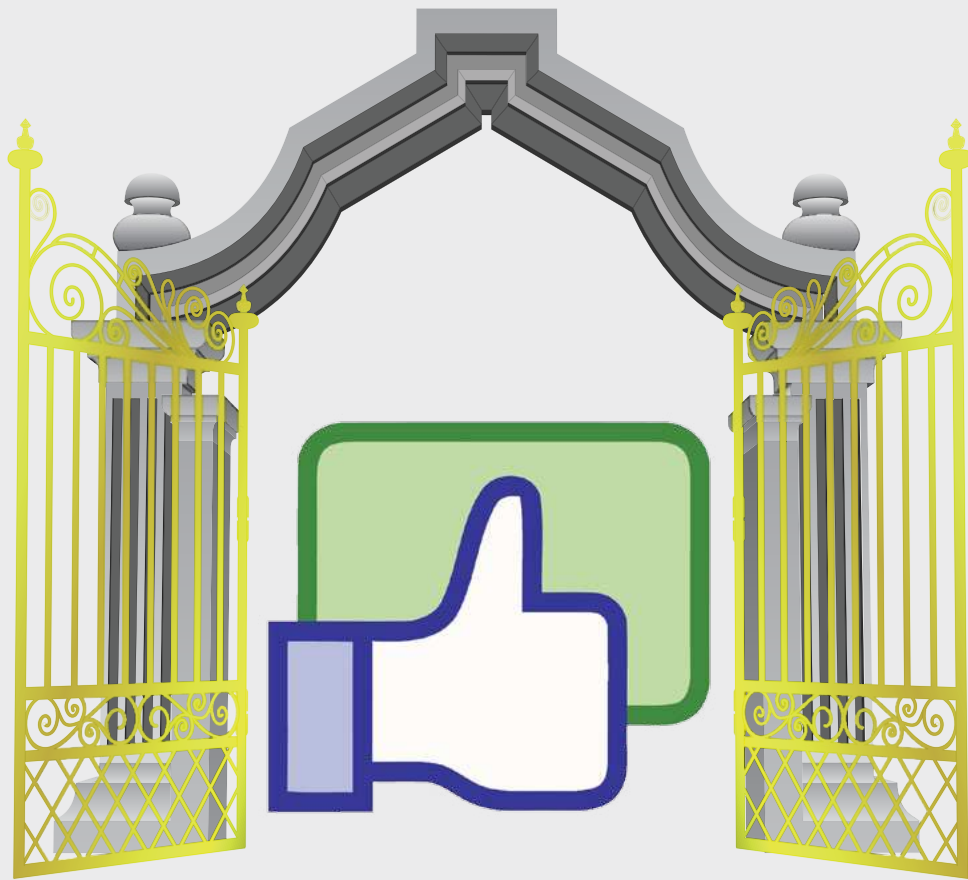
Facebook Bans Like-Gating: 3 Alternatives

To the horror of many, Facebook recently announced it will ban the practice of like-gating this November. In the weeks since this announcement, marketers have rapidly searched for effective alternatives to like-gating. As one of the most widely used tricks on the platform, its absence is sure to be felt by countless marketers, but there's no reason to worry. Below you learn everything you need to know about the three best alternatives to like-gating on Facebook.

News Feed Advertising

Most of the time people spend on Facebook is spent looking over the news feed, not browsing specific pages. That means that the reach of your page is inexorably tied to your ability to enter and maintain a presence in the news feed, and one of the easiest ways to do that is with paid advertising. Advertising on Facebook is an excellent way to achieve a variety of your goals. For example, a Facebook ad is ideal for increasing the number of downloads or clicks for something you are offering, for suggesting content to potential customers, targeting members of your email list, or even just getting the attention of your existing audience. Ads are also great at helping you collect email addresses from current customers and new leads alike.

Rather than focusing on the number of likes you receive on your Facebook page, consider emphasizing your campaign on collecting email addresses or newsletter subscriptions. Once you have those, you can use ads to deliver engaging messages, content, and offers in order to prompts new sign-ups. If the content that you offer in exchange for the user's email address is of value, people will go on to like your page anyway.

Contests and Promotions

The fact that you won't be able to use likes as a means for building your Facebook page with promotions doesn't mean that you can't continue to run those promotions on Facebook. Rather than like-gating your content, you can switch to another form of entry, a form that is even more valuable for your business than collecting likes ever was. For example, you could base entry around user-created content. When someone submits their own content, whether it is photos, videos, or text, it's very likely that every Facebook friend of the entrant will see their entry. That means considerably more exposure for your page. If you take this one step further and require an email address for entry, you gain the ability to reach that lead again later down the road. Either alternative has more value for your business than a like, and both are great alternatives to like-gating.

Form-Gating

Another popular alternative to like-gating is form-gating, which is when users must fill out a form in order to gain access to a resource. That resource could be entering a contest, getting premium content like an audio track, or being able to watch a video. Form-gating works very similarly to like-gating, except you're able to get your hands on consumer data from those who use your form. You can then go on to use that data to create a more powerful social CRM campaign. There are many free and cheap providers of form-gates for you to use, including ShortStack, Pagemodo, Tabsite, and Wishpond.

It's important to remember that you should keep your forms quick and simple to fill out. If you ask for too much information, you will decrease the number of participants who are willing to go through your form. The sweet spot is generally two or three required fields, and then one or two optional ones. Required fields should ask for the information you absolutely need for your marketing campaigns, such as email addresses and phone numbers.

Takeaway

Like-gating may have been one of the most powerful ways to rapidly build a thriving Facebook page, but its demise means little. It may take some time to get adjusted to marketing on Facebook without like-gating, but with any of these alternatives in play, you should have everything you need to succeed.

Building Better Business Curb Appeal

Most business owners spend a lot of time working on the interior of their stores. They make sure that displays are set up properly, the floors are clean and the space is easy to navigate. Yet, curb appeal has a serious impact on whether or not customers decide to come into the store. Here are four ways that curb appeal draws in customers.

Signs

A good sign can be worth its weight in gold to a business. After all, how many stores throw up a sign that gives customers no information? The high mobility of the people in contemporary society means that your customer base is in constant flux. Even if your business is a local institution, there's no way for new residents to know your business is the go-to place for your products or services. A good sign lets customers know the store name and the nature of the business. Also, signage announcing sales and events - banners, for instance - help to create interest in your store.

Parking

Customers will frequently bypass a store if they don't know where they can or should park. If you've got a parking lot, let customers know by throwing up a sign. A battered parking lot can drive customers away. If your parking lot has massive potholes or the paint for parking spaces is faded out, customers may worry about vehicle damage from parking in your lot. Upkeep on the lot can translate to a more welcoming impression and draw in more customers.

Cleanliness

The exterior of your store, even city-owned and maintained sidewalks, functions as a cue for customers. If the sidewalk and parking lot are littered with cigarette butts or trash, it communicates indifference on your part to any potential customers. If the lot or windows look like that, so the thinking goes, how bad will the store be on the inside? Dust-caked windows not only act as a sign of neglect, but also make it more difficult for those passing by to see window displays and products on the shelf.

Displays

Window displays and exterior displays - weather and local regulations permitting - create visual interest in your business. A display with bright colors and motion are ideal, as they draw the eye toward your storefront. An outdoor display that gives would-be customers a chance to interact with a product can sell the product by itself, but even a simple, static display can entice the passerby to stop and take a look.

Curb appeal isn't just a gimmick used by real estate agents. It is a tool that you can use to help draw in customers. By taking advantage of curb appeal, you communicate your commitment to your store, but the features that go into curb appeal -- displays, signage and cleanliness -- also drive sales.
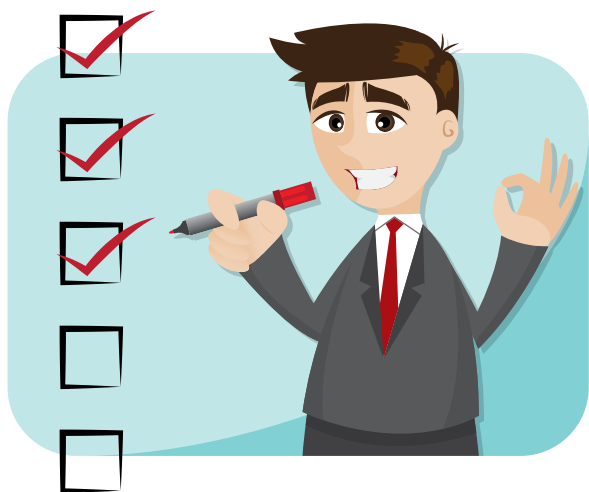
Curb Appeal Checklist

Take a few minutes to review the following items. If you find any issues that need to be fixed, put together a plan or delegate that responsiblity to one of your team members.

Pass	Fail	
☐	☐	**Windows** - Are windows clean? Do window displays and signs look professional? Is the glass in good condition?
☐	☐	**Doors** - Are doors in proper working order? Is the glass clean? Is the paint clean and without chips? Are the mats clean?
☐	☐	**Sidewalks** - Are the sidewalks clean? Are they free of stains, gum and cigarette butts? Is the walkway in good condition?
☐	☐	**Parking Lot** - Is the parking lot clean and empty of trash? Are parking spaces clearly marked? Are all lights working properly?
☐	☐	**Signs** - Are the signs clean? Are all posted signs professional, and not hand written? Are signs illuminated correctly?
☐	☐	**Garbage Cans** - Are the garbage cans in good condition? Are they empty enough to accept today's trash?

How To Get Your Local Business Noticed on Black Friday

A successful online sales promotion around the Thanksgiving season is a powerful way to bring more awareness to your brand. Your potential customers will already be in a shopping mood. A great Black Friday discount will tempt them to try your product or service for the first time. Use these strategies to make sure your online marketing campaign is not lost among the hundreds that will flood your potential customers' inboxes during this hot shopping season.

Set A Goal

If this is your business' first Thanksgiving holiday sale, you may not have a strong idea of what to expect. Set some goals anyway. It does not matter if your sales goal ends up being too large or too small. The benefit is in gaining perspective on how your business can grow with holiday promotions.

Start Early

By Friday, consumers are sick of hearing about deals and promotions. Every business will be fighting for their Black Friday shopping dollar. Do not hesitate to begin your holiday promotion. When you start as early as the Monday before Thanksgiving, you will be the first to get customers excited about fall savings.

Get Social

During Thanksgiving, many of your potential customers will not have time for heavy web-browsing. However, they might be checking

their social media accounts or doing some light browsing while they wait to turn over the turkey. Spread your status updates throughout the week on all of your social media accounts. If you are going to be busy with your own holiday festivities, write your status updates in advance and post them automatically with an app of your choice. This is a smart decision year-round. Automating your posts is a real time-saver if you are serious about your social media promotions.

Stay Relevant

So what if you are not selling turkeys? Chances are, you can make a hectic Thanksgiving dinner easier for your customers. Offer a discounted package or service that will save them time so they can start early on their pies. It does not have to be directly relevant to the holiday. As always, your service should be fast, reliable and easy so your customer has one less thing to worry about.

Be Brief

Again, your customers are busy. This is a terrible time to release a free promotional e-book for subscribers. They will not have time to read it. Keep your emails and blog posts short and light. Photos and graphics in your subscriber emails will get your message across to readers in less than 10 seconds - because that is all they will have to spare between entertaining guests.

Have Fun With It

A Thanksgiving game or contest really lightens the mood of your promotion and makes the holiday more fun. Ask your subscribers to send you a photo of their homemade turkey for a discount or giveaway. Or, ask your subscribers about the things

that make them feel thankful. It sounds a little cheesy, but it's fun and it gets your customers to talk back.

Highlight A Specific Product

When you offer your customers 20 percent off your entire inventory, they may not have an idea of what they can purchase with the discount. Instead, focus on a specific product and promote it. If you sell electronics, take your top-selling camera and offer it at an exclusive discount.

Be Generous

Even if none of your products can be used to make Thanksgiving dinner better or easier, someone else's products can. Offer a giveaway or content with a free turkey or gift basket as a prize. If you can give away something your customers could really use during the holiday, they will remember your business for the rest of the year. This is a fantastic way to get new subscribers to your email list or new followers on your fan page.

Give More

Discounts and coupons are always effective for increasing sales. However, you can supercharge your campaign by offering more for the same price. Create useful freebies to go with purchases and watch your sales explode.

Stay Late

If you run an e-commerce business, do not forget about Cyber Monday. Your business can celebrate both Black Friday and Cyber Monday; there is no rule against it. If you are feeling bold, feel free to extend your promotion into the following week to make sure everyone has had a chance to take advantage of your deals.

If you do not sell products online with an e-commerce website, you can still celebrate Cyber Monday with printable coupons or gift cards. You can even pair up with an online business by cross-promoting with them to your social media accounts or blog.

After the holiday season, assess whether your sales and traffic metrics measure up to your goals and expectations. Your customers will still be in a holiday shopping mood until the end of the Christmas season, so you can continue working on your online marketing strategies to cash in on your share of the frenzy.

Time To Start Planning Holiday Gifts:
But what should you give?

The holiday season is a time for cheer and celebration, right? For many, gift giving during the holidays may bring as much stress as it does cheer. What if you give a gift that's too expensive or not aligned with what the person interests are? What gifts are appropriate for a fellow co-worker, your boss, your employees, and clients? How can you do this without breaking the bank?

If you're a small business that doesn't have the income to spend on lavish gifts, but still want to ensure employee satisfaction, you've come to the right place. Let us help you with the etiquette and unspoken rules of gift giving during the holiday season!

Personalizing gifts when possible is the best thing you can do for anyone you're getting gifts for. Clients, employers, employees, and co-workers want to feel appreciated, which means most often, giving a gift that aligns with their interests will mean more than a generic memento.

There are exceptions to this, as always. For example, if you have so many clients that giving a gift to each one is too much of a financial burden, sending a thoughtful card is a great way to go! It shows you've thought about your clients during the holiday season and appreciate them year-round.

Budgeting for holiday gifts is crucial and will (obviously) depend on your company's finances. Even if you cannot afford to spend a great deal, small, sincere tokens, or handwritten cards are a great way to let people know you are thinking of them.

Do not make the mistake of spending way too much on gifts. Many times, it is the thought that

counts!

Making assumptions are a big no-no in the world of gift giving. Not all employees, employers, clients, or co-workers may celebrate Christmas. Before you give any gifts, it is wise to find out if a person celebrates a holiday or not. You can still give a gift or token, but it may be at a different time. For example, it could be an end of the year bonus (from an employer to an employee) or a small gift after someone finishes a large project!

Everyone should be included when it comes time to give gifts! Don't choose to only give gifts to certain employees, coworkers, or clients! If your business is small, it is more than likely that your employees or coworkers will talk to each other.

If you have several clients within one industry, they may talk to each other as well. As we talked about earlier, people want to feel important and appreciated. If you give a gift to one dentist you work with but don't give a gift to another dentist, they may feel forgotten.

Regifting is a tricky, tricky subject. It is absolutely not an accepted practice everywhere; however it is becoming more and more commonplace. There are a few things to consider before regifting. You need to know if there will be any hurt feelings, both with the recipient and the original gift giver. It would also be extremely inappropriate to regift an item if the original giver is present. The only exception to that rule would be a White Elephant, where regifting is all part of the game! Many people find regifting very tacky, so be careful.

A great rule of thumb for gifts this upcoming holiday season for anyone would be to avoid giving gifts that touch skin. Gifts like that would include soaps, perfume, earrings, etc. Those gifts have an intimate connotation, which a client or co-worker may not appreciate.

Gift cards for similar items should also be avoided. For example, you should not give a gift card for a massage or any gift certificates related to beauty, health or fitness. Those types of gifts would be more suited for a family member instead of a co-worker or employee.

An important thing to remember, gift giving during the holidays is not mandatory. However, if you should choose to partake in the season of giving, a gift should be given to say "thank you" and show your appreciation for the person's help that year. Do not give a gift just for the sake of giving a gift. You should ask yourself "How would I feel if I received this gift from a co-worker/employer/client?" Put some thought into a gift and that will be reflected and leave a lasting impression.

Here are a few gift options to consider:

Gift certificate for a family holiday meal - something the entire family can enjoy!

Gift certificate to a local bakery - some delicious holiday dessert?

A company branded item for the entire family - such as a tote bag

Making a donation to the charity of choice on behalf of the employee

Usability 101: Tips for Improving the Visitor Experience of Your Website

The overall design of your website is extremely important in creating a satisfying experience for your visitors. Websites that are difficult to navigate drive visitors away and negatively affect conversion rates. When it comes to your business, your website is often the first thing your clients will encounter. And as the saying goes, you only get one chance to make a first impression. By incorporating these tips, you can improve the usability of your website and create a wonderful experience for your visitors.

Make Sure the Theme or Topic of Your Website is Clear

Many website owners wrongly assume the intent and message of their content is easily understood by visitors. If people can't understand what you're talking about or selling, they'll leave within seconds of landing on your site. Make sure to grab your visitors' attention right away by giving them the information they're looking for. This lets them know they're in the right place.

Keep Distractions to a Minimum

If your focus is on lead generation or customer conversion, you'll need to provide a clear call to action on your web pages. This should be the most important element of your website. Keep sidebars and links to a minimum; you want to make sure your visitors' attention is focused where you want it to be.

Ensure Content is Easy to Read

Long, complex articles can be overwhelming to website visitors. Avoid jargon, and break your content up using subheadings, bullet points, and lists. This makes the information easier to digest, and helps visitors identify important ideas. You can also play with font size, color, spacing, and contrast to improve the appearance of your pages. You want to make your pages as easy to scan as possible.

Responsiveness

Try to make your website as responsive as possible. Web pages that take a long time to load can cause you to lose visitors quickly. To improve the loading speed of web pages, avoid cumbersome plugins like Flash.

Keep Forms Simple

Website forms should be kept as clean as possible. Remove any unnecessary fields; long, complicated forms can be a deterrent.

Make it Easy for Visitors to Contact You

Visitors don't want to have to do extra legwork to get in contact with you. Make sure your contact information is clearly visible on every page of your website. Buried or hidden contact information sends a message to clients that you don't want to be bothered with their inquiry. When you do receive a message or request, make every effort to respond as quickly as possible.

Have Testing Performed by a Third Party

A third-party usability testing service can be hired to help improve the look and feel of your site. Unbiased third-party testers can give you fresh insight into how attractive your site is to potential clients.

When your website offers clear, well-presented information and user-friendly navigation, visitor satisfaction increases. This keeps potential clients on your site and helps boost conversion rates. By including the above tips in your website design, you ensure a satisfying experience for your online visitors.

10 Free Tools to Test Your Website's Speed

Today, website speed is more important than ever. If you have a slower website, you can count on having a bad user experience and a lower search engine ranking because of it.

Whether you want to test your website's speed or get recommendations, here are ten free website speed tools that can help you:

Aptimize

While this report can take up to 10 minutes to create, don't let this scare you away from this valuable free tool. Aptimize will send you an email once the test is complete, and inside this report, you will be able to view multiple loading-time tests, details and even a letter grade for each section.

FreeSpeedTest

FreeSpeedTest isn't filled with a bunch of features like most speed-testing websites; it gets straight to the point. The great thing about this tool is that it will test your speed using multiple data centers spread across the world, allowing you to know how your fast your website loads in other countries.

iWebtools

This simple and accurate speed test will let you compare your speeds with up to 10 competitors.

Neustar

What sets Neustar above the rest is that it can actually monitor your website based on your

preferences. That way, if something were to happen, you would get an alert. Aside from this unique feature, Neustar will help you understand why your website is loading slowly and help you remove any barriers that are bogging your website down.

PageSpeed Insights

Created by Google, PageSpeed Insights will analyze your website in less than 30 seconds. In its report, it will offer recommendations, show a speed score and give you links to tutorials on how you can fix your issues. If Google is offering these recommendations, you better fix it right away.

Rapid Search Metrics

This simple tool can be very valuable if you're looking for a bit more than your website's loading time. Rapid Search Metrics offers an in-depth analysis, a load time estimate based on different connections and separate reports for your CSS files, images and more.

Website Goodies

If you want a report that is created within seconds, then this tool is more than enough. Website Goodies will simply generate your loading time on the screen and nothing else.

WebSiteOptimization

This free tool offers an in-depth look at your website's speed, along with recommendations on how you can actually improve your loading times. Some additional features include a global report, calculating object sizes, exact loading times, a speed report and recommendations.

WebToolHub

WebToolHub gives you two options: simple and advanced. In the simple mode, it will test your loading time and website speed using various servers in the world. In the advanced mode, the tool will analyze the speeds and check every element of your website.

Yslow

Created by Yahoo!, Yslow analyzes web pages and will show you hundreds of ways to improve your website's speed. Inside a report, you will be able to view your grade, suggestions, a summary, statistics about that page and tools to help your website load a lot more faster. Aside from the tools, Yslow created 23 guides to make your website a lot more efficient and faster.

Local Online Directories: Why it is Critical your Business is Listed!

While the internet opens up global markets to even the smallest business, the fact remains that 80% of a small business' customers come from a 5 mile radius from their location. Over 30% of all Internet searches are local searches that typically include a city, state or zip code in the search query, like "plumbers in Fresno."

Local consumers are using the web to search for the products and services provided by local businesses. In fact, recent studies show that 97% of consumers go online to research the products and services they want to buy locally.

As a local business owner, this is very important. If your business isn't showing up on the first 1-2 pages of search engine results, those potential customers (who are actively searching for what you offer) will find your competition first, meaning you lose out on the chance of securing that additional business.

Local Search Optimization, a form of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) focuses on ensuring local consumers find your business, and when they do, they are presented a professional representation of your business, services and products. A key element of Local Search Optimization is ensuring your business is listed properly on as many online directories as you possible.

What Are Online Directories?

Quite simply, online directories are today's version of the old yellow pages. Businesses are listed based on location and category. There are hundreds of online directories, so the key is to place your business on as many relevant directories as possible.

The more relevant directories you are on, the higher ranking you can achieve on the three main search engines, Google, Bing and Yahoo. Online directories, such as yp.com are easy to identify, but even sites such as Yelp, which is thought of

more as a review site, are considered important online directories. Studies show that today's consumers place a higher level of trust in local listings than any other kind of search results. This means that getting your business listed in the various directories is a key factor to your ability to attract new customers.

How Can You Get Your Business Listed on Local Online Directories?

Being properly listed in online directories can benefit you in two ways. First, because these online directories have high "authority" in the eyes of the search engines, you might often find that when you search for a local product, service or business, the directory listings will actually appear close to the top of the search engine results. Secondly, the more online directories you are listed in, the higher you can rank in Google's local search results. This can be key to driving more traffic to your site, your store, or making your phone ring; resulting in higher sales.

97% of consumers go online to research the products and services they want to buy locally.

Based on your business industry, there are important "niche" directories that you'll want to ensure you are listed in. As an example, photographers will want to make sure they are listed on wedj.com, which has a domain authority score of 72, and is free. Domain Authority (DA) is a website metric developed by Moz. It is one of the most important numbers known to SEOs.

The greater a site's DA, the more likely they are to have strong traffic and high rank. The more directories your business is on that have a high DA, the better chance you have of obtaining

a high search engine ranking in local results. Additionally, there are specific U.K. and U.S. based directories that you might want to focus on.

Typically, most of the online directories offer a free business listing. You'll need to navigate to their business submission form, and fill out all of the information, select the proper business categories and on some sites upload your logo and other images. Many of these free directories also offer enhanced business listings at a cost which often allows you to add more information, such as photos, logos, videos, and offer a highlighted listing. Be aware that many directories will contact you once you submit your free listing to try and upsell you to a preimum listing. Typically, the free version has enough key information that the paid version is not worth the investment.

There are also online directories that require a payment to be listed on. Many of these are niche specific, such as repairpal.com, a directory important for mechanics and auto part stores in the U.S. which has a domain authority score of 71. You'll need to evaluate the importance of the directory, the features offered, and of course the monthly rate. Many businesses do see a good return on their investment on these niche sites. Make sure you aren't locked into a long-term contract, so if you aren't seeing results, you can move that money elsewhere.

While getting your business listed on most online business directories is free, it does take a significant amount of time to setup, create and optimize your business listings on the 80 or more of the top local online directories. For local search optimization, when it comes to online directories, accurate and consistent information is everything. Your business' "NAP" (name, address, phone number) must be consistent and correct wherever it appears on the Internet. If "street" is spelled out on one directory, it must be spelled out on all of them.

As a business owner you know that time is money. When it comes to setting up your business on dozens, if not hundreds of online directories, you have three choices; 1) You can do it yourself (assuming you have nothing else to do for days on end); 2) Have one of your paid employees do it for you (hoping that they understand what to do and can properly optimize your listings; 3) Hire a local firm that offers local search optimization. They can make sure that your listings are setup and optimized properly for a reasonable investment.

Important Local Business Listing Attributes

Your Business Title

Your business title is one of the key factors for achieving a high ranking in the local search engines. Having a business title that remains consistent across all data sources is very important. Having the same title in all your listings helps the search engines establish trust in the existence and location of your business.

If your business calls itself "Frank's Pizza" in one directory and "Frank's Chicago-Style Pizza" in another directory, there is a high probability that Google and the other search engines will see that as two separate businesses. As such, you lose the benefit of being listed from a local SEO perspective, and can cause consumer confusion.

A key local SEO approach is to choose one title for your business, and use it consistently for all the online directories you setup.

The Google Quality Guidelines For Local Businesses make the following provisions regarding the naming of a business:

- Your title should reflect your business's real-world title.
- In addition to your business's real-world title, you may include a single descriptor that helps customers locate your business or understand what your business offers.
- Marketing taglines, phone numbers, store codes, or URLs are not valid descriptors.
- Examples of acceptable titles with descriptors (in italics for demonstration purposes) are "Starbucks Downtown" or "Joe's Pizza Restaurant". Examples that would not be accepted would be "#1 Seattle Plumbing", "Joe's Pizza Best Delivery" or "Joe's Pizza Restaurant Dallas".

Categories

Local Online Directories will ask you to select a number of categories— usually between two and five—that help describe the nature of your business.

This is a critical step in creating your local business listing. The search engines use category data when deciding which businesses to show when a consumer searches for a particular keyword.

If your business is not setup in the proper categories, you can be missing out on the chance for potential consumers to find you and to do business with you.

Business Details

The details you can enter about your business on an online directory will differ depending on the directory. Some offer very basic information, while others allow you to provide a variety of details. They key is to leverage every aspect being offered. Additionally, the number of characters allowed to describe your business will vary. Make sure you utilize every character available to provide a detailed description of your business and the services or products you offer.

Photos and Videos

Whenever possible, add photos and videos to your online directory listings. Attractive photos and videos have been shown to increase the number of clicks that a particular listing gets. They are a great way to show off your business, the products and services you offer, as well as your team. Quality images can help you stand out from the competition.

Photos and videos don't seem to have a huge effect on ranking results. A Google+ Local business listing with no photos has just as much potential to rank well as a listing with six photos and three videos—however, since a potential customer may be more inclined to click through on your search results if there is a compelling photo, adding them is worth it.

Your Website

A local SEO step that is often overlooked is having your contact information on your website in a format that the search engines can read. Your contact information must be in readable text—not embedded in an image or other formats that search engines can't crawl. The information listed should include your complete business name, address, and phone number (NAP), using the same information listed in the online directories.

To further strengthen the signals of your NAP, you may choose to encode it in markup code that all major search engines agree upon and understand. You might need to have your webmaster take care of this for you.

If you'd rather not list your contact information on your webpages, you should set up a clear "Contact Us" page which includes your NAP details.

Local SEO Fundamentals

Absolutely the most important aspect to Local SEO is the consistency of information in your online listing. This data about your business influences the "trust" search engines like Google have in the validity of your business. Ensuring that every online listing of your business lists your correct NAP and website address is crucial to your ability to rank well.

Remember that things change, and having outdated information on your business listings can have a negative effect on consumers. If you change your business hours, you'll need to update your listings. If you move to a different location, you'll need to update your listings. Some studies have shown that refreshing your online listing information on a quarterly basis can help improve search rankings.

Finally, there are new online directories popping up on a regular basis. You'll want to add your business to these as part of your regular listing maintenance. Developing a strategy for your local SEO is the best way to ensure that your business is doing everything it can to be current and visible in local search.

The Ultimate List of Local Directories

Ensure your business listing is setup on each of these local directories to help consumers more easily find you. Remember, if they can't find you, they will find your competition!

1. Google
2. Bing
3. Yahoo!
4. Yelp
5. Merchant Circle
6. LinkedIn
7. YellowPages.com
8. Urbanspoon
9. Whitepages
10. Supermedia
11. Yellowbook
12. CitySearch
13. Mapquest
14. Biznik
15. Local.com
16. Foursquare
17. ThinkLocal
18. CitySlick
19. USYellowPages
20. SuperPages
21. Outside.in
22. Dexknows.com
23. BizJournals.com
24. TeleAtlas
25. JustClickLocal
26. Discover our Town
27. Metrobot
28. EZ Local
29. twibs
30. LocalEze
31. Kudzu
32. CityVoter
33. Manta
34. Zipweb
35. MatchPoint
36. UsCity.net
37. Local Site Submit
38. InfoUSA
39. Axciom
40. Infignos
41. Yellow Assistance
42. Get Fave
43. My Huckleberry
44. GenieKnows
45. MojoPages
46. Brownbook
47. Magic Yellow
48. CitySquares
49. TeleAtlas
50. Navteq GPS
51. Judy's Book
52. Simplyhired.com
53. Yellowbot.com
54. BBB.org
55. Hotfrog.com
56. eLocal.com
57. Bestoftheweb
58. Yellowpagecity.com
59. Angie's List
60. Mojopages.com

News You Should Know

Google Earnings Released, Revenue Up 20%

Google recently released its earnings for the third quarter with revenue up 20% year-over-year at 16.52 billion.

CFO Patrick Pichette said, "Google had another strong performance this quarter, with revenue up 20% year on year, at $16.5 billion. We continue to be excited about the growth in our advertising and emerging businesses."

Paid clicks were up 17% year-over-year, and up 2% quarter-over-quarter. Average cost-per-click decreased 2% year-over-year and remained consistent from the second quarter.

Facebook Introduces new app "Rooms"

Facebook's Creative Labs has launched an iOS app called "Rooms,

'Rooms' is the new app from Facebook that lets you create places dedicated to what you're interested in and to invite others that share your passions too. Rooms are invite-only chat rooms based on common interests. Chat rooms are invite-only and require a special code that can be scanned with your phone's camera, according to Facebook. Codes can be shared on social media, e-mail or even posted on paper in public spaces. Chat room creators or other specified moderators can customize the look, ban people from the room or set the room to be 18+.

LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING
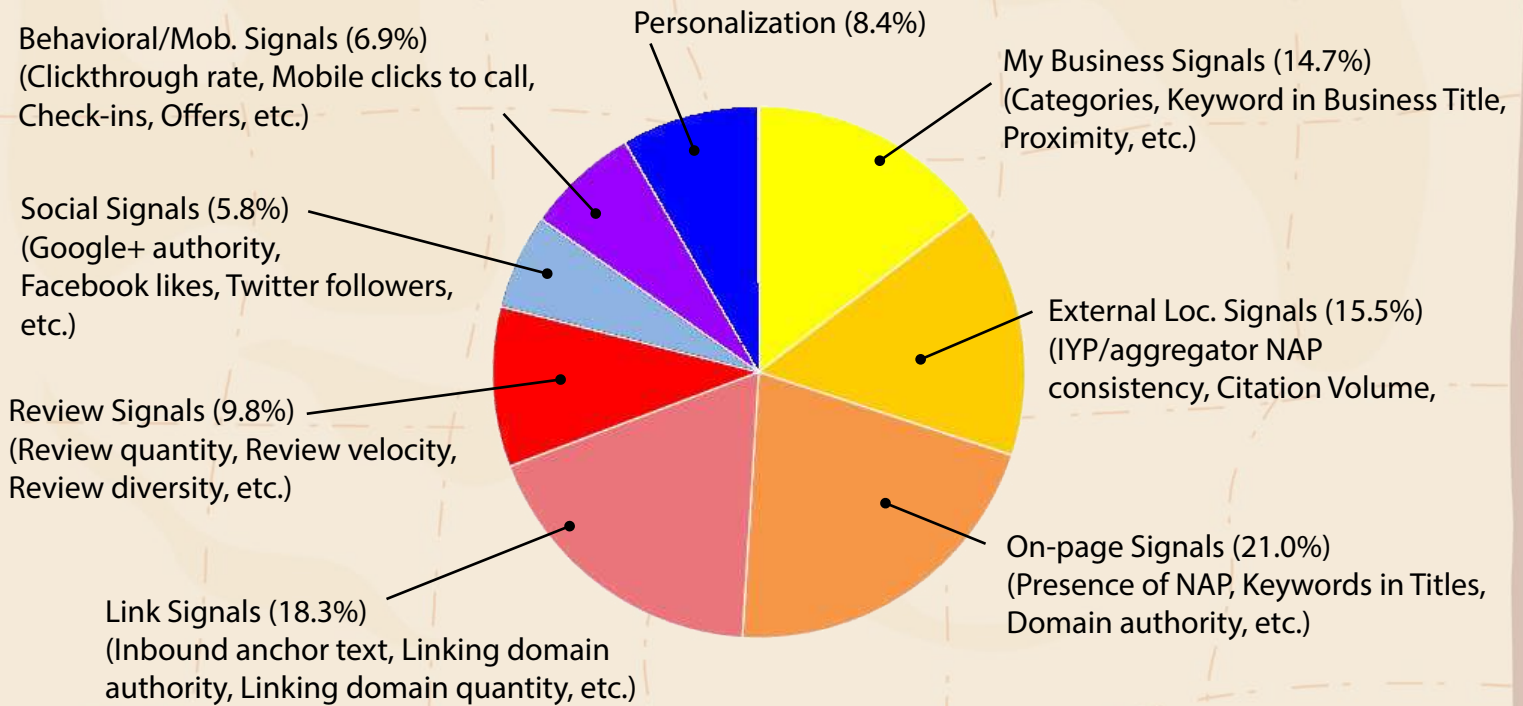
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Local Search Ranking Factors

Behavioral/Mob. Signals (6.9%)
(Clickthrough rate, Mobile clicks to call,
Check-ins, Offers, etc.)

Personalization (8.4%)

My Business Signals (14.7%)
(Categories, Keyword in Business Title,
Proximity, etc.)

Social Signals (5.8%)
(Google+ authority,
Facebook likes, Twitter followers,
etc.)

External Loc. Signals (15.5%)
(IYP/aggregator NAP
consistency, Citation Volume,

Review Signals (9.8%)
(Review quantity, Review velocity,
Review diversity, etc.)

On-page Signals (21.0%)
(Presence of NAP, Keywords in Titles,
Domain authority, etc.)

Link Signals (18.3%)
(Inbound anchor text, Linking domain
authority, Linking domain quantity, etc.)

Top Localized Organic Factors

1 City, State in Landing Page Title
2 Domain Authority of Website
3 Page Authority of Landing Page URL
4 Quality/Authority of Inbound Links to Domain
5 Quality/Authority of Inbound Links to Landing Page URL
6 Physical Address in City of Search
7 Quality/Authority of Structured Citations
8 Product / Service Keyword in Website URL
9 Click-Through Rate from Search Results
10 City, State in Landing Page H1/H2 Tags

Negative Ranking Factors

1 Listing detected at false business location
2 Incorrect business category
3 Mis-match NAP / Tracking Phone Numbers Across Data Ecosystem
4 Mis-match NAP / Tracking Phone Number on My Business Landing Page
5 Mis-match Address on My Business Landing Page
6 Presence of malware on site
7 Keyword stuffing in business name
8 Reports of Violations on your My Business page
9 Presence of Multiple My Business Pages with Same Phone Number
10 Absence of Crawlable NAP on Location Landing Page

Source: Moz 2014