

Introduction

With Google's guidelines tucked safely under your belt, several local search marketing practices are no-brainers. Just follow the steps and rest assured there is minimal risk for a Google takedown. However, it can be easy to get tripped up when practitioners:

- 1) Incorrectly interpret "gray areas" in the guidelines
- 2) Lack necessary or skill set
- 3) Recommend bad practices, careless of what they could cost their business or their clients

To help enterprises and their agencies avoid these missteps, it's important to know the top-five local search ranking do's and don'ts. Continue reading to find these critical tips based on a global body of experienced, recognized industry experts who are surveyed annually.

Credit: <http://www.websitemagazine.com/content/blogs/posts/archive/2016/07/22/10-local-search-marketing-do-s-and-don-ts-that-can-save-your-business.aspx>

5 Local Search Marketing Do's

5 Local Search Marketing Do's (cont)

Your local business listings (a.k.a. citations) on Google, Yelp, Facebook, YP and other major players should have more positive impact than citations you get from weak, little-known sources. While inclusion in small, hyperlocal directories can prove a genuine boon to local businesses, devoting a lot of effort to getting listed in low-quality general directories is unlikely to yield meaningful ROI.

5 Local Search Marketing Don'ts

1. Incorrect Business Category

When you create your Google My Business listing, you get to choose categories from Google's category base. Picking the wrong categories can make you invisible in the local pack results.

2. Listing Detected at False Business Address

The best local business advice you may ever hear? Fire anyone who suggests you falsify your business location to Google. Google reads street level signage and has become increasingly sophisticated at understanding the difference between a legitimate address and a virtual office, P.O. Box or other fake address. Any business location you list with Google must be a genuine, real-world location of your business, even if it's a service-area-business or home-based company.

3. Mis-matching NAP or Tracking Phone Numbers Across Data Ecosystems

Google and other search engines don't assume you've entered a correct name, address and phone number (NAP). They will investigate by combing the Web, and gathering multiple mentions of these vital pieces of business data about your company. If most sources match, Google feels 'trust' and will reward you with firmer rankings. But, if you've got variants in your name, address or phone number out there, or a proliferation of indexable, mismatching call tracking numbers, Google's lack of 'trust' can doom your best ranking efforts.. Take one minute to do a quick check of your local business listing health using one of the many free listing tools out there. If you discover mismatching NAP out there, it's time to start weighing both manual and paid solution options for cleaning up your traditional listings plus all other references to your business on blogs, news sites, social media, etc.

4. Presence of Malware on Site

Nothing can drive customers (and subsequently, rankings) away from your business like Google's warning: This Site May Harm Your Computer. An infected or hacked website represents an emergency for any business, requiring immediate resolution. Here are Google's suggestions for recovering from this dreaded scenario.

5. Reports of Violations on your Google My Business location

Google is far from perfect at policing their own local business listings, but your customers, competitors and civic-minded marketers can lend them a helping hand in the fight against spam, reporting guideline violations directly to Google. Some spammers skate on the idea that Google is too slow or lazy to catch them, but never underestimate how a competitor may respond to any perceived guideline infraction.

1. Physical Address in City of Search

Unless you are physically located in a given city, it is highly unlikely to be included in Google's local pack results relating to a city other than your current address. Exceptions to this could include having a very unique business model (the only vegan doughnut shop in a 100-mile radius) or being located in a very rural area (just three hotels serving eight towns). Don't pin your hopes on ranking locally for any city you don't physically occupy. Go after organic rankings with content you develop for these location-less cities, or spring for paid advertising..

2. Consistency of Structured Citations

'Structured' citations are designated as those that exist on traditional search engines and core local business directories. Think Google My Business, Facebook Places, Bing Places, Yelp, YellowPages, Superpages and Citysearch. Experts agree that having consistent NAP (name, address, phone number) on these sources matters most. But, don't forget the unstructured citations (mentions on blogs, online news, social media and small local directories), too.

3. Proper Google My Business Category Associations

Covered above, do not pick incorrect Google My Business categories. If you have the wrong categories, definitely take the time to research better alternatives and edit your listing. Google wants you to choose the fewest, most specific categories as possible.

4. Proximity of Address to the Point of Search

This is one of the positive factors over which you don't have direct control, but can indirectly influence. Search engines like Google know exactly where a user is searching from and strive to show him the results nearest to his physical location. This is observable on desktop devices and even more so on mobile devices. While you can't, of course, control where your customers are searching from, you can ensure that the content on your website makes maximum effort to prove your 'local-ness' to each searcher. Local landing pages are an effective approach to ensuring that each of your business' locations is represented by a unique, high quality, accessible page on your website..

5. Quality/Authority of Structured Citations



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