

Local Search Engine Marketing

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What is Local Search?

Some definitions of Local Search:

- Local Search is any search made with the goal of finding something within a specific geographic location. This is known as searching with *local intent*.
- Local Search is searching for some thing (what) in some place (where).
- Local expert, Greg Sterling, defines Local Search as seeking information online with the intention of making a transaction off line.
- Essentially, anything that you would traditionally look for in the print Yellow Pages becomes a Local Search when it is conducted online.

There are two basic types of Local Search:

- **Nearcasting** can be used to describe when a searcher is looking for something close to his or her current location.
- **Farcasting** can be used to describe when a searcher is looking for something elsewhere, often in a place where he or she hopes to be in the future.

Distinguishing types of local search in this way helps us to determine which strategies to focus on for a particular type of business:

- Some enterprises, such as hotels, resorts, rafting companies, cruise lines, etc., rely on non-locals searching for them.
- Some, like realtors, concert venues and well known restaurants need to be easily found by both locals and out-of-towners.
- Some rely almost exclusively on people nearby their location being able to find them. Examples are hair salons, bakeries, dog groomers, neighborhood eateries, carpet cleaners and plumbers.

Why Is Local Search So Important?

It's estimated that 30 to 40 percent of all searches are made with local intent. However, for certain types of businesses, search almost always has local intent. If you have such a business, it is critical to be found for as many pertinent local searches as possible.

If where you are is important to what you do, then you must maximize your business's presence in the Local Search results and optimize it for the best performance. People searching for you may be across town or a continent away. Wherever they are and wherever you are, you want them to find you.

After years of languishing, the Local Search ecosystem has recently become a bustling, buzzing place, as an assortment of players jostle for a stake in what is a critical online space for most brick and mortar businesses.

- Local businesses of all types are realizing that they need a visible online presence in order to compete in their marketplace.
- The Local Search platforms of major Search Engines have become very robust, with useful features that attract an ever-increasing number of searchers to them.
- The users of print yellow pages are rapidly moving to Internet Yellow Pages and to other locally-focused websites for information that they used to look for in printed phone books.
- The Search Engines know that Local Search is different from traditional search and that when people search with local intent, they want and expect to see different results.
- The Search Engines are committed to integrating Local Search results into the regular Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs).
- The Search Engines and the mobile network service providers (like T-Mobile, Verizon, etc.) agree that Local Search results are the logical results to show to searchers using mobile devices, such as cell phones and PDAs. In other words, they believe that searches made on mobile devices are most often made with local intent.
- The Internet Yellow Pages marketers realize that their clientele needs to get online. They are trying to make it quick and easy for them to do so by providing bundled online marketing options

- The number and importance of Social/Local websites is growing and they are becoming more popular among users because the user generated content they contain is what shoppers crave.

This convergence of sellers and buyers primed Local Search for its current explosion. Now, searchers, businesses, Search Engines, Internet Yellow Pages, Local and Social/Local sites and Search Engine Marketers all have a huge interest in making it work.

Local Search is currently a much less competitive universe than traditional online search. However, this will change as more and more small business owners realize the importance of Local Search and become actively involved in it.

It's critical to learn how Local Search works now. It will enable you to gain the best possible presence for your business AND position you to keep up with changes and developments as they occur. With Local Search, as with most other business and internet endeavors, the early adopters disproportionately reap the rewards.

How People Search, Locally

When people search, they have a need to fulfill. They don't want the process to be confusing or complicated; they simply want a solution to their problem or an answer to their question.

Each of us has our own personal style of searching and, once we find a strategy or two that delivers the results we expect most of the time, we tend to stick with what works. The choices we make and habits we fall into include where we go on the internet to perform our searches, how we describe what we are looking for, and how we refine our searches when the results we get are not those that we expected.

The top search engines are committed to making the results they provide as relevant as possible for every query made.

As the Search Engines have worked to refine their results, searchers have learned to phrase their queries in an effort to receive the most relevant information. For instance, people have learned to use

geographic qualifiers in online searches. They type in what they want and where they want it to be.



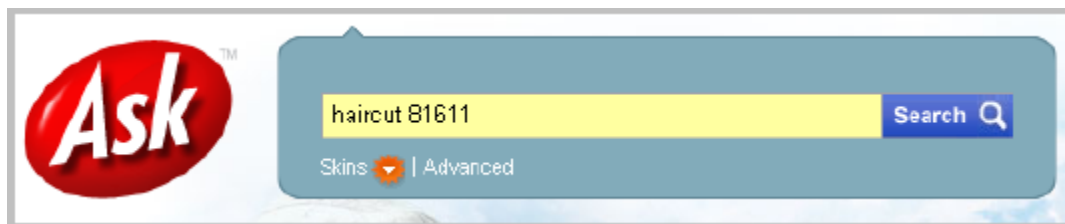
Some people have learned to type in an area code or zip code instead of a location name, since it is a good indicator of location. Familiarity with your location and good keyword research, coupled with effective optimization and pay-per-click advertising campaigns, maximizes your chances of being found when queries like these are made.

Other people find the level of relevance they require for location-specific searches by personalizing their search parameters on a search engine or going directly to a local search platform, an online yellow pages site, or a vertical directory that permits them to search in the way that suits them best.

How Local Searches Are Made

Searches are made within the search boxes of the major Search Engines.

Examples: Yahoo, Google, MSN and Ask - using geographic qualifiers, such as: *haircut 81611, condo in Maui and Greeley pc repair*



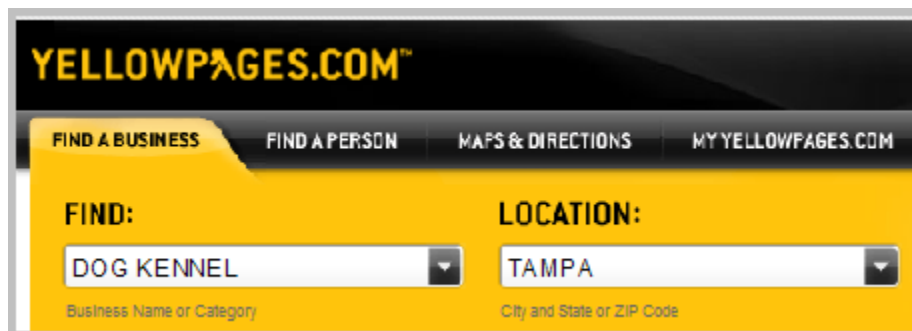
Searches are made within the Local Search areas of the big Search Engines

Examples: Yahoo!Local, Google Maps, Windows Live Local and Ask!City.



Searches are made on an Internet Yellow Pages (IYP) website.

Examples: Superpages, Yahoo!Yellow Pages, Dex Online



Searchers go to a website that features local businesses and local information.

Examples: local newspapers, chamber of commerce, regional tourism bureau.

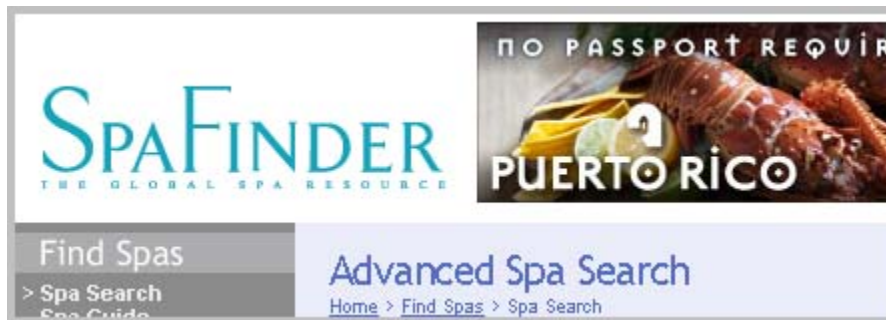


Searchers use a local-specific vertical search engine.

Examples: Local.com, Localeze, TrueLocal

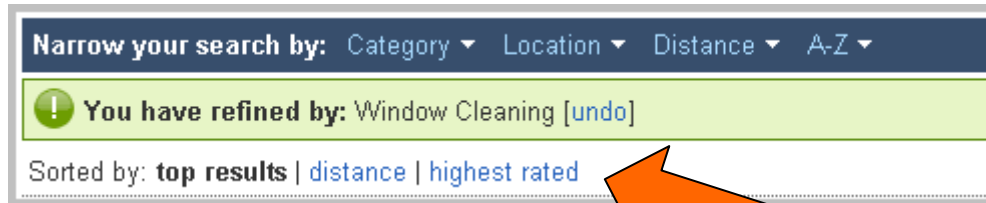


Searchers use a vertical directory or vertical search engine. Websites that feature information about a specific type of product, service or business. Examples include Hotels.com and BookFinder.com. There are many more of these than you would imagine!

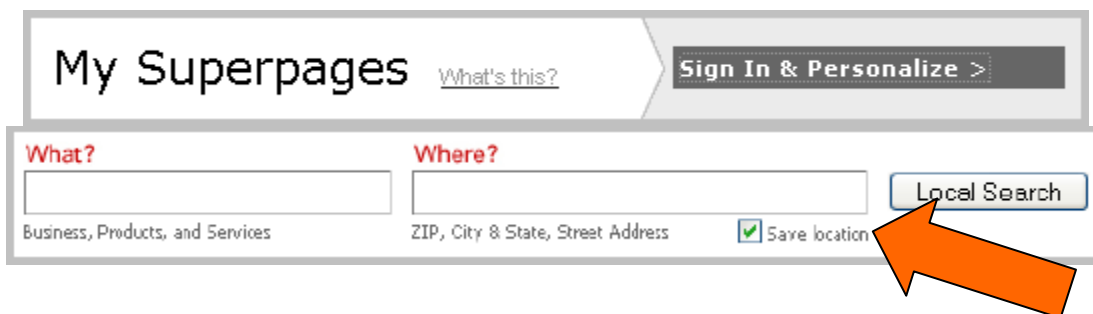
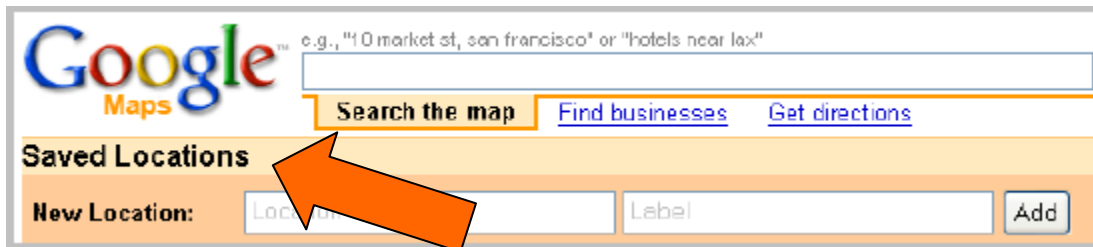


Search results are personalized - the searcher superimposes his/her own parameters on the results.

Example: In Yahoo!Local, one may choose to see listings either according to Yahoo's algorithm, in order of the distance from the searcher's location, alphabetically, or by how the business has been rated by consumers.



Personalized results can be delivered based upon a searcher's location preference. Examples: Yahoo's MyLocal or Google Maps or by opting into location preferences in places like SuperPages.com and Local.com.



Each of these search methods can return very different results, but searchers are only interested in getting the information they want when they instigate a query. They are often unaware or don't care about the particulars of how and where they are searching. They develop search habits which give them results with which they are

satisfied and normally don't change those habits until the results no longer suit their needs.

Most business owners are also unaware of the ways people can search with local intent. Where a particular search result came from, how it got there, who supplied the data and how to change or correct the information displayed can be a mystery. Learning these things can definitely give you an advantage over competitors who do not know them.

Business Profiles

Profiles vs. Websites

Local Search results generally take searchers to a business profile, instead of to your website. In fact, you don't even need to have a website to get your business listed in most local places. Think of your profiles as multiple mini-websites for your business. Every one you have is one more place where potential customers can find you and one more page about you that may rank in the SERPs.

Research shows that searchers on local platforms are typically not researching or browsing, but are deep into the decision-making process and are close to buying. Conversions on local search platforms are generally much higher than those gained from other forms of search.

When a business name is clicked on, additional choices are given to provide the searcher with more information about the business. At Google Maps, he or she can choose to go to the business website or find more information about the business from the profile pages. Additional choices include reading (and writing) reviews, placing a toll free call, sending the information to a cell phone, getting directions, or searching for other things near the business.

Do I still need a website?

No, you don't. However, I think having a website can help your rankings by building the Search Engine's trust in the information they

have about you. I also think that if there's a ranking tie, the business with the most powerful website wins it.

A good website also allows you to give much more information to your prospective customers than a business profile does and it helps to build their trust and confidence in you.

Business profiles do not offer the same marketing advantages that your own website provides. For the most part, you cannot control the look or the layout of your profile, although you may be able to upload a logo, photos and videos. Also, there is not normally a place for you to craft promotional messages within business profiles - just the facts, such as information about where your property is, what you sell and how you can be contacted.

However, any profile that allows you to upload a video (Google Maps and some Internet Yellow Pages have recently added this feature) provides a great marketing opportunity. I recommend this as a powerful way to introduce yourself to prospective customers and to sell yourself and your business.

While it's very important that the information in your business profiles is accurate and contains as many facts about your business as the profile template allows, it is still beneficial to have your own website, which you can use for other purposes, including gaining rankings in the results.

How Can You Tell Where to List Your Business?

I suggest claiming, verifying, updating and enhancing your free listings in this order of importance:

- Google Maps
- Yahoo Local
- MSN Live Local
- Yahoo YellowPages
- Superpages
- AskCity

In my opinion, it's crazy to not take advantage of any free Local listings you can get. However, this can be very time consuming and you are not assured of any increase in either website traffic or calls or

walk ins to your business. So, you'll need to make some choices about how your time will be best spent. One reasonable strategy is to make a list of all the places you'd like to put your business information and do a few of them every week.

To come up with your own customized list of local websites and prioritize them, search. See which locally-focused websites rank for the terms you would like to rank for. If Superpages or Yellowbook or Switchboard rank for the terms you covet, then by all means, make certain you are included on their websites. If Yelp, MerchantCircle, InsiderPages or Business.com rank well for your terms, get listed there!

Resources for Business Profiles

Local Business Listing Guide

By eCommerce Optimization

A good source of where to list and how to get listed.

<http://www.ecommerCEOptimization.com/local-business-listing-guide/>

Guide On How To Get Your Business Listed On Major Local Search Engines, Yellow Pages Sites and Social Local Networks: How to Get Listed – Updated - Deleted

By Frank Fuchs

A great guide with detailed information about getting listed on Local Search Engines, Internet Yellow, relevant Social Sites and even a few UK, France and Germany specific sites.

<http://www.locallytype.com/pages/submit.htm>

Anatomy & Optimization of A Local Business Profile

by Chris Smith

The parts of a local business profile and what to put where.

<http://searchengineland.com/071217-081815.php>

How to Get on Google Maps Without an Address

By Chris Silver Smith

<http://searchengineland.com/080211-070058.php>

Google Maps Help Group

An online forum run by a couple of Googlers to help Maps users.

<http://groups.google.com/group/Google-Maps>

Official Yahoo!Local Blog

<http://www.ylocalblog.com/>

Yahoo!Local Team's Blog on Yahoo 360

<http://blog.360.yahoo.com/blog-EJc8k3lod6nWz2Aq6SB2bDs7Gw--?cq=1>

Live Search: The Official Blog of the Live Search Team at Microsoft

<http://blogs.msdn.com/livesearch/default.aspx>

Asks Official Blog

<http://blog.ask.com/>

WebmasterWorld's Local Search Forum

http://www.webmasterworld.com/local_search/

How to Rank Better in Google Maps

Here are some how-to articles on *How to Rank Better In Google Maps*. Although these were written specifically for Google, most of the suggestions apply to your other business profiles, as well:

- **Get Listed!** <http://newsletter.blizzardinternet.com/rank-better-google-maps-part1/2008/02/13/>
- **Standardize Information and Build Trust**
<http://newsletter.blizzardinternet.com/how-to-rank-better-in-google-maps-part2/2008/02/21/>
- **Make Your Website Speak for You**
<http://newsletter.blizzardinternet.com/rank-better-google-maps-part3/2008/02/22/>
- **Choose All the Right Categories**
<http://newsletter.blizzardinternet.com/how-to-rank-better-google-maps-part4/2008/02/26/>

Internet Yellow Pages (IYPS)

The Original Local Search

Print Yellow Pages are the original local search. However, they are widely available only to those within a specific geographic area. As people have gone online, so have their searches. Now, it is easy to search the yellow pages directories for some thing, some where, but that somewhere can be just about anywhere in the world.

Thirty-five to 50% of yellow pages users are specifically looking for a particular merchant by name, so your property needs to be well-represented on these websites.

Partner Up With The Internet Yellow Pages

IYPs tend to rank very well for many, many local terms. Instead of trying to beat them, consider them as partner sites where your business should be listed. All enterprises get a basic listing in the IYPs by simply subscribing to a business phone number.

Your print yellow pages representative often handles advertising for his or her company's online directory. You have the option to purchase a variety of services from them:

Enhanced listings

Various levels of enhanced presence can be purchased in different Online directories. By paying more, you usually get preferred placement, meaning your ad shows up before the ads of other businesses that pay less than you do. An upgraded listing can also give you more space to provide information about your business. This may include logos, photos, videos, brand graphics, and live links to your website, as well as more room for details, such as amenities, discounts offered.

Pay Per Click Advertising

Many IYPs also offer pay-per-click advertising. You pay not only for preferred placement, but also for each time someone clicks on your ad and goes to your website or to another place on the web where they can view additional information about your business. Some IYPs will even create simple websites and host them for you, which can be a easy solution for busy business owners.

Some of the IYP's have distribution networks, which place your ads not only on their website, but on the websites of their partners. Depending on the provider, this may even include ad placement on Google, Yahoo and MSN. Buying your advertising through one of these networks really simplifies the entire process for a small business owner.

Pay Per Call Advertising

IYPs offer pay-per-call options as well. This service provides a unique tracking number in your ads; you pay each time someone calls that number. This is similar to paying each time someone clicks on one of your pay-per-click ads and goes to your website. However, you actually get to talk on the phone with a pre-qualified customer – a person who has searched for what you are selling.

Advantages of dealing with the IYPs

- They have *feet on the street* – a sales force that comes to your place of business and knows you on a personal level.
- They bundle services together into packages, which makes Search Engine Marketing easier to accomplish without having to learn how to do it for yourself.
- They offer marketing packages at various price points, so nearly every business can afford to advertise online.
- They generally provide for monthly payment for their services, which helps small businesses to manage their advertising budgets.
- They are innovative in offering features tailored to the small business owner. Examples include hosted websites and video ads.

Disadvantages of dealing with the IYP's

- They know the Yellow Pages inside and out, but they don't seem to really understand search or the Search Engines.
- They tend to think that if you advertize with them, all your online marketing needs will be fulfilled.

- In my experience, their sales force does not fully understand some of the online advertising products they are selling.

Which Internet Yellow Pages?

You want to appear in all of the online Yellow Pages that get considerable traffic. These include:

- Yahoo!Yellow Pages
- Superpages
- Yellowpages.com
- Switchboard.com
- Dex Online

Most importantly, you want to appear in the online counterparts of whichever print telephone directories are distributed and used in your local area. These will likely be the ones chosen by the people near by you when they search online.

Local/Social Sites

By its very nature, Local Search is very social. All of the major platforms include ways for people to share information about businesses with which they are familiar. This is usually in the form of reviews and ratings.

Local/social sites often take this a step further by integrating additional social features like blogs, local news and management responses to reviews. Most offer a business profile. Some are free, others are not. See the *Resources for Business Profiles* section for details on who they are and how to get listed with them.

If practical, take advantage of anywhere you can get a free listing, but the most important consideration for listing on local/social sites is to search your location and keyword terms to see who is ranking well. These sites should be your first priority for setting up listings.

Examples of Local/Social sites: Yelp, CitySearch, Insider Pages, Topix, Craig's List and Merchant Circle.

Standardization of Information

Your business gains credibility in Local Search by demonstrating consistency in the information presented about it across the internet. Since different platforms gather their information from different sources, it can be rather confusing.

For example, if you are listed as The Starlight in one place, The Starlight Bar and Grill, in another, the Starlight Restaurant in a third and The Starlight Corporation in a fourth, the Search Engines may or may not be able to tell which of the listings refers to your business. They may even think they are 4 different businesses.

You may be listed in one place using a P.O. Box and in another with a street address. To complicate matters, it is not unusual for the address of a corporation or LLC to differ from the physical address of the business. It can be difficult for the search engines to put all of that information together, so it is necessary to monitor and update data on as many local platforms as possible in order to standardize it. Correcting, updating and standardizing information is called *data hygiene*.

As business data is standardized in more and more places, it is considered to be more reliable. Therefore, the Search Engines give greater weight to it in their algorithms. This has become increasingly important as the Search Engines work to augment the facts in their local business profiles with additional information that their spiders discover when crawling the web, including what they find on the business' own website.

Monitoring your business information across the web is simple. However, it can be very time consuming to perform searches for all the variations of your name, phone number and address, then go to each listing, check the information for accuracy and consistency and make changes where needed.

Data Aggregators

The majority of local search websites derive their information about businesses from one or more of four major data providers, also known as aggregators. Aggregators get their facts from print Yellow Page

directories and other relevant databases, such as those for business licenses and corporate registrations. They make their money by selling the information they compile.

You can see where local search platforms get their information at Bruce Clay's Local SE Relationship Chart
<http://www.bruceclay.com/serc-local.pdf>

Begin your data hygiene at these sources:

- Info USA
- Amacai
- GeoSign
- Acxiom

Find the details of how to do it here:

Local Business Listing Guide

By eCommerce Optimization

A good source of where to list and how to get listed.

<http://www.ecommercoptimization.com/local-business-listing-guide/>

Guide On How To Get Your Business Listed On Major Local Search Engines, Yellow Pages Sites and Social Local Networks: How to Get Listed – Updated - Deleted

By Frank Fuchs

A great guide with detailed information about getting listed on Local Search Engines, Internet Yellow, relevant Social Sites and even a few UK, France and Germany specific sites.

<http://www.locallytype.com/pages/submit.htm>

Another option for data hygiene is a Local Database directory.

Local Database Directories

There are an increasing number of vendors selling listings in specialized database directories of local businesses. These are designed as ways to place your business information in one place and push it out into local profiles across the web.

You may purchase a listing in a directory or setup your own directory as part of your website. See an example at the Blizzard Local Listings
<http://profiles.blizzardtracker.com/>

These can provide several advantages:

- You can update your data quickly.
- The information is regularly distributed to all of the important online local platforms.
- This standardizes your data, which increases your credibility with the search engines.
- It enables effective management of most of your local business profiles from one easy-to-use online interface. This can save you an enormous amount of time and - especially if you have multiple locations - making the annual subscription fee a bargain.
- Depending upon where these directories live, they may actually rank for some terms. (Some of the most powerful ones live on the websites of local newspapers.)

Things to consider:

- None of them really seem to do everything that you expect them to. However, this is most often due to the data receiver(s) and not the data pusher.
- Not all vendors are the same. Shop around and find those that provide the features most important to you. Then, compare pricing.
- Not all directories are the same. Ask questions, look at live examples online. Check to see if what is promised is actually delivered.
- I'm almost certain that profiles that are claimed and verified by the business owner get more weighting than those that get their info through bulk uploads. A Yahoo!Local representative has confirmed this for his Search Engine.
- For almost all of these directories, the links are no-followed and pass no link juice to your website.

Keyword Research

Finding Local Terms

As with all optimization, optimization for local search must begin with keyword research. The most successful local keyword research is accomplished through the collaboration of someone intimately familiar with an area and a professional who understands the process of keyword discovery and has the right tools to do the job well.

While someone from out of town will likely search for *Denver* terms, those more familiar with the area are more likely to use terms like *Littleton, Cherry Creek, Stapleton or Highlands Ranch*. Competition for lesser-searched terms like these is typically not as fierce, so by ranking for them, you can enjoy much of the "*low-hanging fruit*" in your marketplace.

Therefore, it's just as important to optimize for these terms as it is to do so for your main traffic terms. If you don't, you won't get the opportunity to sell to a large number of the searchers who are looking for what you have to offer.

If you are not intimately familiar with the local geography and vernacular, enlist the aid of someone who is. In Key West, Florida, for example, *guest house* is a very popular term. In New Hampshire, the term *country inn* is very well-known, but *guest house* is not. In New Jersey, beach locations are known as *the shore*, while in other parts of the country, that term brings nothing but questioning looks.

Your mission is to discover all of the specific geographic terms people are searching for that are highly pertinent to your business. Is it *pop* or *soda*? *Water fountain* or *bubbler*? *Spa* or *hot tub*? Choosing the right terms for specific geographic areas can make a world of difference.

The Long Tail of Local Search

People will search for your business, products and services in ways you've never even thought of. For most businesses, the greatest

amount of traffic comes from just a few keywords. These tend to be rather broad and many businesses compete for them.

There are many, many more terms that only get a few searches per day and some that are only seen once or twice a month. However, when you add up the cumulative traffic potential of these terms, they can easily account for as much or more traffic than the major terms do.

Google tells us that 1 out of every five searches is made with a combination of keyword terms they have never seen before. This makes for a very long tail of search terms.

In addition, people are now using longer search terms than in the past. For example, what may have been a simple search for *computer printer* 10 years ago, may now be something like *canon photo 926 grand rapids under \$300*.

If you are a carpet cleaner, some of the terms searchers may use are fairly obvious:

<i>Carpet cleaning</i>	<i>carpet cleaner</i>	<i>steam clean carpets</i>
<i>Shampoo rugs</i>	<i>clean rugs</i>	<i>shampoo carpet</i>

However, some are not so obvious. Remember, people are usually looking for a solution to a problem when they search, so think of what words they may use. Some possibilities when looking for carpet cleaning might be:

<i>remove pet stains</i>	<i>clean pet stain on carpet</i>
<i>eliminate cat urine odor on oriental rug</i>	<i>remove carpet mold</i>
<i>clean red wine spill on white berber</i>	<i>clean carpets no chemicals</i>
<i>best carpet cleaner in your town</i>	<i>carpet cleaning service reviews</i>

Local specific long tail terms include combinations of the types of terms you see above with geo-qualifiers that themselves may not get many searches. These include neighborhoods, local slang for geographic terms, regions, common misspellings and the like.

The Characteristics of Long Tail Terms

- Low to very low search volume (0-5 searches per day)
- Usually contain 3 or more words
- Highly targeted - the searcher knows what they're looking for
- Searcher is near the end of the buying cycle (ready to buy)
- Relatively easy to rank for in organic searches
- Relatively cheap to bid on in ppcs

Long tail terms are also referred to as *low-hanging fruit*. Why? Because there is little competition for them, so they are easy to rank for in organic searches and cheap to bid on in the pay per clicks. They are like ripe cherries dangling easily within reach.

How to Find Your Low Hanging Fruit

Many long tail terms do not show up in keyword tools. So, how do you find them? Look in your website tracker, log files or in Google Webmaster Central. You'll be amazed at some of the searches that land people on your web pages.

Here are some terms that brought searches to a bed and breakfast website:

black and white rooms

tofu broccoli soup

venetian festival Saugatuck

blue star highway, mi

holland tulip parade

family reunion lodging Michigan

Julia hollenberg

new years eve events in Michigan

Some of these provide actionable clues and some do not.

What action do you take?

- Look at these at least once a month.
- Analyze and learn from them.
- Add some of them to your ppc campaigns.
- If you'd like to grab even more traffic related to that term, optimize for it so you can rank even better and possibly net more terms related to it.

Optimizing for Long Tail Terms

Often, the only thing needed to optimize for a long tail term is to place the term within the text of a good, relevant page on your site, preferably one with a little PageRank.

You can also create a new page. For example, with the long tail carpet cleaning terms above, you could create a page that lists all of the types of stains you can remove and optimize it for *carpet stain removal + your town*. You could also do the same for *carpet odor removal + your town*. One well-optimized page can rank for many related long tail searches and capture traffic for new combinations of keyword terms, as well.

Creating new, well-optimized pages is a good long term investment in your online business. It can attract additional targeted traffic to your web site for years and years. It is also ideal as a landing page for relevant ads and, as such, will get you a good quality score for your pay per clicks, which will keep your cost per click down.

Long Tail Terms in Your PPCs

Begin by setting long tail terms up as broad matches in your pay per click accounts, so that you get the greatest opportunity to appear for new searches. If your cost per click is high and/or your conversion rate is low, then switch to phrase match to try to improve your return on investment. However, for the most part, these terms are cheap and they are very targeted, so your cost per click will be well worth it.

If you don't have a top quality score, try improving your landing page by making certain that the terms you're bidding on appear on the page.

Criteria for Keyword Selection

Main keyword phrase (optimize your homepage for this):

- It gets enough searches to be worthwhile. This is relative and depends upon your location and type of business.
- It is very relevant to where you are and what you do or sell.

- You have a reasonable chance of competing in the rankings for it, but don't be afraid to compete.
- Your best keyword phrase may be your location coupled with your brand or name, if they are well searched. Example Roto-Rooter, Sherman Williams Paint, Copy Copy.

Caution: Do not choose a term that is too broad, such as *plumber* or *Colorado plumber*. Even if you can rank for it, it probably won't bring targeted traffic.

Secondary Keyword Phrases (optimize strong interior pages for these):

- Variations of the main keyword phrase. Examples: *plumber in denver*, *denver area plumber*, *downtown denver plumber*.
- Terms that narrow the focus. Examples: *aurora plumber*, *cherry creek plumber*, *toilet repair denver*.
- Your name and your brands, even if they don't get many searches. **You need to come up for your own name – these are the most targeted searches you can get.**

Long Tail Terms:

- There can be many, many of these terms that get only a few searches per day. Use all that are relevant. Just 2 searches per day adds up to 700 searches per year. Ranking for 10 of them can mean being seen for 7000 searches over the course of the year. This can be significant, especially for a local business that sells big ticket items or services.
- It's not usual for these search queries to contain 3-5 words.
- Long tail terms are highly targeted and can indicate that the searcher is getting close to buying.

Keyword Research Tools

Try several tools. Find one you like and learn it inside out. It's okay to stick with a simple free tool if you have simple needs and are not in a highly competitive niche, but you may be missing out if you don't experiment with others. As you learn more and experience increased

success, you may want to upgrade to something with more analysis included.

Paid Tools

Wordtracker

The original professional keyword research tool.

Free Trial <http://www.wordtracker.com/free-trial.html>

Free Keyword Research Guide (PDF)

<http://www.wordtracker.com/academy/keyword-research-guide>

Free version of WordTracker <http://freekeywords.wordtracker.com/>

Keyword Discovery

Similar to Wordtracker, but with more seasonal trend information.

Free Trial <http://www.keyworddiscovery.com/register.html>

Free Version of Keyword Discovery

<http://www.keyworddiscovery.com/search.html>

SEOMoz Keyword Difficulty Tool

Helps you figure out how hard it will be to rank for a term. Available only with premium membership to SEOMoz.com

<http://www.seomoz.org/keyword-difficulty>

Wordze

Focuses on trends, hot topics and competition research.

\$7.95 One Day or \$45 One Month Trial

<http://www.wordze.com/subscribe.php>

NicheBot

Uses Wordtracker, Keyword Discovery, Google and Yahoo Keyword Tools all in one place.

\$1 Trial

<http://www.nichebot.com/tour.html>

Keywords Analyzer

Desktop application that's less expensive than the others - \$97 one time fee.

<http://www.wordze.com/subscribe.php>

Keyword Spy

Gives you your competition's pay per click keywords

Paid tool with Free Trial

<http://www.keywordspy.com/trial.php>

Free Tools

Google AdWords Keyword Tool

Enter a keyword phrase and it suggests other phrases that may be applicable.

You may also give the tool a URL and it will generate keyword terms applicable to that page. This is a great way to see what Google thinks a page is about. It also sorts according to what Google thinks is most relevant.

You can also copy and paste text in a box and it will tell you what keywords Google feels are most relevant to that content.

It's useful to run this on your pages, as well as your competitor's pages. <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

Google Trends

No numbers, but graphs showing trends, including comparisons between keyword terms.

<http://www.google.com/trends>

MSN adCenter Labs Tools

Keyword Group Detection, Forecasting Search Volume Seasonality, Keyword Mutation Detection and other unique tools from MSN Labs.

<http://adlab.msn.com/KeywordContent.aspx>

SEO Book Keyword Suggestions Tool

An Aaron Wall tool (he has many) powered by Wordtracker. This is a pretty comprehensive free tool that lets you see results from several other tools all in one place.

<http://tools.seobook.com/keyword-tools/seobook/index.php>

Webmaster Tool Kit Keyword Analysis Tool

Give it a page and it shows what words are on the page and in what percentage. This gives you clues as to what the Search Engines think your page is about when they spider it.

<http://www.webmaster-toolkit.com/keyword-analysis-tool.shtml>

Good Keywords

Small, downloadable desk top application.

<http://www.goodkeywords.com/>

SEO Digger

Another analysis tool that helps you see for which terms a page has ranking power and how many searches are made for them.

<http://seodigger.com/>

5 Minute Site Location Keyword Generator

Helps you generate keyword lists with locations. Really handy for urban areas.

http://www.5minutesite.com/gen_keywrds.php

Can I Compete?

A large component of your market research is seeing who your online competitors are and determining what it will take to compete with them.

Your online and real world competitors may be very different sets of businesses. Some of your biggest real world competitors may not even be online. They may have poorly optimized or poorly converting websites and/or they may not understand Local Search at all. In these cases, you get a big advantage – at least until they catch on.

Who Are Your Online Competitors?

- The websites that rank for the terms for which you want to rank.
- The websites that rank above you in relevant Local Searches.
- The businesses bidding for the same terms you bid on in Google AdWords, Yahoo Search Marketing and MSN AdCenter.

You can tell which sites these are by putting your keyword research to work for you. Choose the top keyword terms you'd like your pages to rank for and search for those terms in Google regular web search.

Note the URLs that appear in the first ten spots in the SERPs. Note their Page Rank, google backlinks, the number of pages on the site and anything else of interest: are they well optimized? Do they have good links? Or links that may soon be discounted?

Then, figure out who the weakest players are and what it will take to unseat them. (Once you rank better than they do, set your sights on the next strongest players.)

Example of simple competition research:

Search Engine: Google

Keyword Term: *Orlando vacation homes*

Rank	URL	PR	Back links	Pages	Notes
1	http://www.orlandovacation.com/	4	3	51	bazillion links from wunderground – Google counts 3
2	www.orlandovacationhomes.com	4	9	51	Lots of dupe titles & descriptions
3	www.homes4uu.com	3	9	77	Many dupe titles and descriptions- ugly site
4	www.orlandovillas.com	3	14 – 4 from own pages	1430 About ½ the pages not indexed	directory on site:4 pages of links with anchor text & descriptions- uses UK terms
5	www.allstarvacationhomes.com	4	1080 pgs 827 indexed	501 -Many from kingdømmagictravel	tons of links from forums – lots of dupe titles

It's not unusual to find that some of the sites that rank in the top 10 are unbeatable. You may never be able to outrank Wikipedia, DMOZ or Business.com, for example, or a page or subdomain that's part of a very powerful nationwide or worldwide website. Examples of these would be Marriot or Trane.

The good news, however, is that some of these sites may only be **online** competitors, so it really doesn't matter if they outrank you. Wikipedia, for example, doesn't have a physical location or sell anything. Searchers may find your competitors through Business.com, but you can list your business on their pages, so that searcher can find it, too. Consider these as potential partner sites, rather than competitors.

Finding Partner Sites

It's very likely you will find other sites that you should consider partnering up with, instead of trying to compete with. These could be sites like those of a:

- trade association
- Better Business Bureau
- Internet Yellow Pages
- local Chamber of Commerce and/or Convention and Visitor's Bureau
- local business directory
- local city guides
- local newspaper – these often have local business directories on their websites
- vertical directory for your industry
- locally focused powerhouse, such as CitySearch, Topix or Craig's List

While you may eventually be able to outrank some of these sites, it may be an unrealistic goal when you're getting started. Do what it takes to gain visibility on those sites, instead - join, list, advertise, sponsor, etc.

If you have a coin laundry in Hyattsville, Maryland, for instance, you would want to be listed on the websites below because they rank first, second and third for that term. These web sites should be good sources of targeted traffic to your web site. In addition, links from them will often help your site to rank better for your keyword terms.

[Laundry Equipment in Silver Spring MD - Yellow Pages](#)

Aspen Manor **Coin Laundry** MAP 13647 Georgia Ave Silver Spring MD 20906 301-946-8337
... Brite & Clean **Laundromat** MAP 7703 Garrison Rd **Hyattsville MD** 20784 ...
www.yellowpagecity.com/US/MD/Silver+Spring/Laundry+Equipment - 34k -
[Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[The Silver Spring Yellow Pages and Silver Spring MD Yellow Pages ...](#)

Yellow Pages for the Greater Silver Spring MD yellow page area: Use our yellow pages search engine to ... **Coin** & Bill Counting Sorting & Wrapping Machines ...
www.yellowpagecity.com/US/MD/Silver+Spring/CityPages/ - 274k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
[More results from www.yellowpagecity.com »](#)

[Laundromat listings for Maryland](#)

Spin Cycle **Coin Laundry**, 4402 Saint Barnabas Rd Temple Hills MD 20748, (301)702-8009.
Spin Cycle **Coin Laundry**, 2309 Chillum Rd **Hyattsville MD** 20782 ...
www.laundromatfinder.com/listings/MD.htm - 65k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Laundries Self Service Hyattsville MD | Laundromat Hyattsville](#)

Search Laundries Self Service in the YellowUSA **Hyattsville, Maryland** ... part of the self service **laundry** industry; **coin**-operated **laundry** equipment is also ...
hyattsville-md.yellowusa.com/Laundries_Self_Service.html - 71k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

Sometimes, large powerful sites rank for terms they aren't even going after. To see which other websites want to rank for the terms you want to rank for, go to the Google search box and search for your terms in quotes. This will give you the sites that rank for that term.

Other clues can be had by using the special Google operators below:
http://www.googleguide.com/advanced_operators_reference.html

Restrict Search to Sites where Query Words Appear

Operators	Meaning	Type Into Search Box (& Results)
allinanchor:	All query words must appear in anchor text of links to the page.	allinanchor:useful parenting sites (Search for pages that are called useful parenting sites by others.)
inanchor:	Terms must appear in anchor text of links to the page.	restaurants Portland inanchor:kid-friendly (Search for pages on Portland restaurants for which links to the page say they are "kid friendly.")
allintext:	All query words must appear the in text of the page.	allintext:ingredients cilantro chicken lime (Search for recipes with these three ingredients.)
intext:	The terms must appear in the text of the page.	Dan Shugar intext:Powerlight (Find pages mentioning Dan Shugar where his company, Powerlight , is included in the text of the page, i.e., less likely to be from the corporate website.)
allintitle:	All query words must appear in the title of	allintitle: Google Advanced Operators (Search for pages with titles containing "Google,"

	the page.	"Advanced", and "Operators".)
<u>intitle:</u>	The terms must appear in the title of the page.	<u>movies comedy intitle:top ten</u> (Search for pages with the words movie and comedy that include top ten in the title of the page.)
<u>allinurl:</u>	All query words must appear in the URL.	<u>allinurl:pez faq</u> (Search for pages containing the words pez & faq in the URL.)
<u>inurl:</u>	The terms must appear in the URL of the page.	<u>pharmaceutical inurl:investor</u> (Search for pages in which the URL contains the word investor .)

For your competition research, the most useful of these operators are:

- *allintitle* – if all the terms are in the title of the page, they are obviously optimizing for it
- *allinanchor* – if all the terms are in the text of links pointing to the page, that is very likely what the page is about
- *allinurl* – if someone has placed all of the terms in the URL, it must be an important term for the page

Consider the pages that rank well in these searches for your best keyword terms to be your present and/or future competitors.

What If My Competition Is Really Tough?

If you have no realistic chance of competing for a given term, then reconsider what you want to optimize for. The term *hotel denver*, for example, may appear out of your reach for a number of reasons, including, but not limited to:

- You have a new web site
- Your site has relatively few pages
- Your site has few good links
- Your site has weak link reputation
- Your pages have little or no Page Rank

While these are all factors that are within your power to improve, it generally takes time, money and know-how. So, while you're working and waiting, target your optimization towards less competitive terms. Going for *denver hotel* could cut your competition by a third and *hotel in denver* could cut it in half. *Downtown denver hotel*, *luxury denver*

hotel, hotel denver airport, DIA hotel or suite hotel denver might be good possibilities for you.

These terms have fewer people searching for them, but the searchers are looking for something rather specific. If you offer exactly what they are looking for, you have a very good chance of getting their business. So, while a smaller amount of highly targeted traffic may bring you fewer shoppers, it may bring you the same number of buyers, perhaps even more.

As you gain links, Page Rank and link reputation, you can begin to rank for *denver hotel*, as well.

Local Search Competitors

Now, search for your best keyword terms in Google Maps to see where you appear in the rankings and who ranks above you. These are your competitors in Google Local Search.

Try to figure out why they may be ranking above you and what, if anything you can do about it. Here are some things to look for:

- See what categories those businesses are listed in.
- Look at their locations on the map.
- Go to their website and see what their pages are optimized for. Do they have local information on their pages?

- Then, view their Local Business listing:
 - Do they have a lot of good reviews?
 - Is their profile as complete as possible?
 - Does it have optimized text?
 - Is there some factor that could be giving them an unnatural advantage? Examples of this might be: a location in the center of town, the keywords are in their business name, they have multiple locations that give them 5 spots above yours instead of just one, etc.

Repeat this process in Yahoo!Local and Windows Live Local.

Are there businesses that rank better than the others, including you, in several of these sources? If so, these are the ones you should consider to be your main online competition. Anyone who ranks well in regular Google web searches, Google Maps searches and Yahoo Local Searches is either very lucky or very savvy. Look at what they are doing and try to learn from it.

Resources for Competitor Research

SEO Book Competitive Research Tools

Aaron Wall's collection easily reached from this page:

<http://tools.seobook.com/competitive-research-tools/>

SEO Digger

Enter a url and see the terms it ranks in the top 20 of Google for. This one's great for your own site and the sites of your competitors.

<http://www.seodigger.com>

Website Optimization for Local Search

It's All About Relevance

The Search Engines want to return the most relevant results for every search query made. This is true for both regular and Local Search.

How do they determine relevance? Currently, these are the big three factors for Google:

- The page title.
- The content on the page.
- What the links pointing to the page say the page is about.

More than 100 other factors have been identified that probably enter into the Google algorithm. SEOmoz.org

<http://www.seomoz.org/article/search-ranking-factors> has compiled a definitive list of Search Engine Ranking Factors through the collaboration of 37 of our most respected SEOs. It's a must read for anyone serious about Search Engine Optimization.

On-Page Optimization

What the Search Engines See

The only information the search engines know about your website is what their spiders can learn about it from online pages – those on your website and other websites. You cannot typically dictate what is displayed on other people's websites, but you have complete control over what is communicated on yours. Make certain to use it to your best advantage.

Most search engine spiders can only read the text on your page. They cannot read words contained within images or JavaScript files.

Include Local Information on Your Pages

Address and Phone Numbers

For Local Search, it is critical to have your business name, street address, city, state and zip code on each page of your website in text form. Include your local phone number, along with the area code, in addition to your toll-free number.

Traditionally, web designers place this information in the footer of web pages. However, placing it anywhere on your pages is fine, as long as it is in text form. If your name does not describe what your business is and what it's about, then it's wise to give the spiders that information in text form, as well.



This site places location information in a footer that appears on every page of the site. The website below displays address/phone in the sidebar. They also clearly tell both Search Engines and human visitors that they are a Sacramento, California hotel-in text.



Keywords in Content

You'll also benefit by using any and all terms which are searched for within the text on your pages. If your business is near the Denver airport, you will certainly want to use that term. However, you will also want to mention *DIA*, *Denver International*, the FAA airport code (*DEN*), and *Pena Boulevard*, which leads to the airport. The more clues you can give the Search Engines, without being spammy, the better.

Create Local Content

The more original content (pages) you have on your site, the better the search engines will like it. The more pages you add to your site that have been optimized for specific local terms, the more opportunities you have to gain the attention of both search engines and potential customers. By adding information that is helpful and interesting to searchers, you're increasing the chances that they will like your website – and the business it represents.

Page Title, Description and H1

Your optimization will be most powerful when you optimize each page for one keyword phrase. Use that term at or near the beginning of your page title. Use it – or a variation of it – again in your meta-

description. Then, if it makes sense to the reader, add an h1 tag at the beginning of your text that also uses the same term.

Off-Page Optimization

Currently, the most effective strategy for off-page optimization is dependent almost entirely upon the number of quality links pointing to the pages of a website.

Links to a page are essentially votes from other web pages for that page. However, there is no democracy in this type of voting - all votes are not equal. Google gives weight to a vote (link) based upon their assessment of the quality of the page it comes from and what the link text says about the page it points to.

Basic qualities of good links:

- They are from pages that do not use any deceptive tactics, such as cloaking.
- They are from pages on websites that are trusted by search engines.
- They are from pages viewed as authorities on a specific subject by search engines. (That subject may be a location.)
- They are from pages whose subject matter is related to or complementary to yours.
- The link is in text form and the text of the link pointing to your page contains good keyword terms.
- There are not too many other links on the page – the fewer the better.
- They have a Google Page Rank of 3 or higher.

Best Links for Local Search

In addition to the criteria above, the best links for local search optimization have a local twist to them:

- They are from other websites in your locality – businesses, organizations and institutions.
- They are from trusted local authority sites, such as your Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau.

- They link to you using a geo-qualifier in the text of the link, such as *New Orleans jazz concerts* or *business card printing in Baltimore*.

How to get local links:

- Your website can reflect and benefit from relationships you already have. Politely ask for links from your network of social and business contacts. Offer a link back to their website if it makes sense for your website visitors. Exchanging links with unrelated websites is no longer a good practice.
- Expect to pay for membership to gain a listing and link on the websites of some organizations, such as your Convention and Visitor's Bureau or regional trade or industry association.
- Buy advertising on websites that can send targeted traffic to your website. Make certain you receive a text link to your website in addition to any banner or image link displayed.
- Ask for a link when you contribute to a charity, school or other non-profit which has a website.
- Offer a discount or add-on to groups in exchange for a link on their website. An example might be a local business group, like the Rotary Club, the alumni association of a nearby college or a school sports team.
- Look at the websites of your competitors. See who links to them and ask for links from those sources, too, if it's appropriate.
- Make comments on blogs about your area and about your products/services and include your website address in your signature; most blogs provide a clear place to put your URL when you make comments. Some permit you to add a trackback as well.
- Send out press releases to your local media with one or two links to your website in the copy. Be certain you have something newsworthy to convey. Including a good photo or two will increase your chances of having your news published.

Local Search Has Its Own Algorithm

Google and Google Maps each have different algorithms, and ranking factors are weighted differently in the organic Google SERPs and in Google Maps (Local) SERPs. You can easily prove this to yourself by performing a search for the same keyword term in both Search Engines. You'll see disparity in the rankings about half of the time, which indicates that their algorithms are very different.

In some cases, none of the top 10 results in regular search appear in the top 10 in local search, and sometimes, when you click into Maps results from the local results area at the top of the SERPs page, you will see that those don't match up either.

Local one box (or local 10 pack) at the top of the regular SERPs:

The screenshot shows a Google search for "ocean city nj rentals". The search bar contains the text "ocean city nj rentals" and a "Search" button. Below the search bar, there are two tabs: "Web" and "Maps". The "Web" tab is selected, and the search results are displayed. The first result is "Ocean City NJ Rentals" from www.BooktheJerseyShore.com. The second result is "Summer Rentals in OC, NJ" from djz.bergerrealty.com. Below these results, there is a section titled "Local business results for rentals near Ocean City, NJ". This section includes a map of Ocean City, NJ, with ten red location pins labeled A through J. To the right of the map is a list of ten results, each with a lettered pin icon, a business name, a website URL, and a phone number. The results are: A Pavilion Motor Lodge, B Ocean 17 Apartments, C Beach Club Suites, D Wild Dunes Inn, E Beachview Inc of Ocean City, F Holly Properties, G Jay's Room Air Conditioning Rentals, H Edgewater Apartments, I Ebb Tide Suites, and J Just Four Wheels: Ocean City. At the bottom of the list is a link for "More results near Ocean City, NJ".

Google Search

Web Maps

Ocean City NJ Rentals
www.BooktheJerseyShore.com Summer **rentals** are filling up fast! Reserve your va

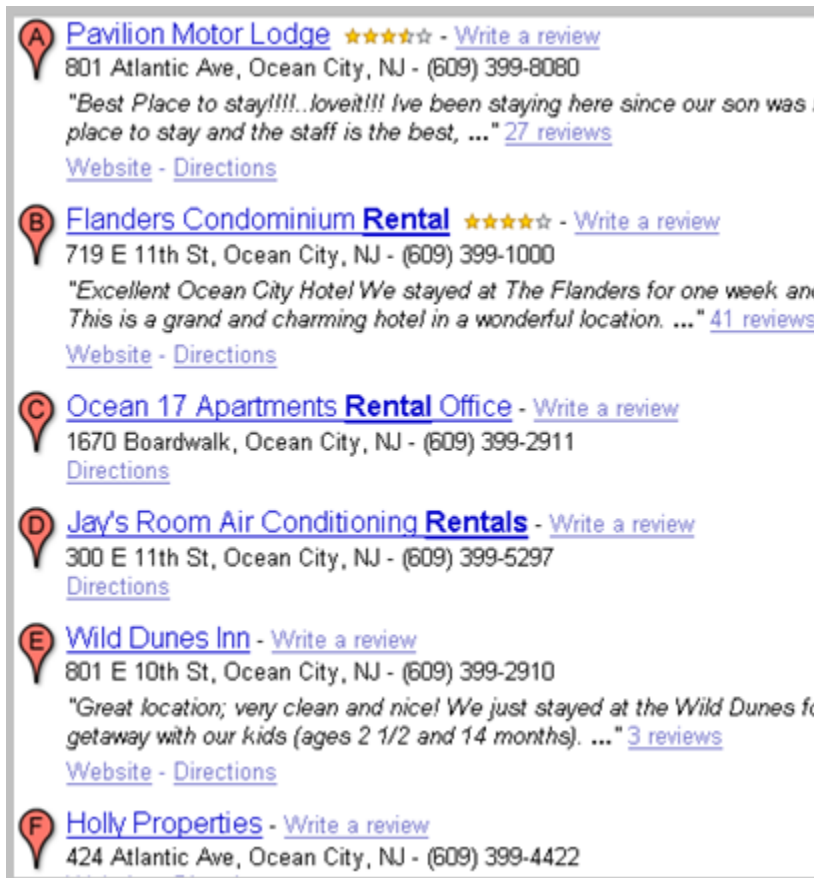
Summer **Rentals** in OC, NJ
djz.bergerrealty.com Search over 3000 **rental** properties in **Ocean City, New Jers**

Local business results for **rentals** near **Ocean City, NJ**

- A** [Pavilion Motor Lodge](http://www.pavilionmotorlodge.com) - www.pavilionmotorlodge.com
- B** [Ocean 17 Apartments](http://maps.google.com) - maps.google.com - (609) 39
- C** [Beach Club Suites](http://www.beachclubsuites.com) - www.beachclubsuites.com - (60
- D** [Wild Dunes Inn](http://www.wilddunesinn.com) - www.wilddunesinn.com - (609) 399
- E** [Beachview Inc of Ocean City](http://maps.google.com) - maps.google.com - (
- F** [Holly Properties](http://www.hollyproperties.com) - www.hollyproperties.com - (609) 3
- G** [Jay's Room Air Conditioning Rentals](http://maps.google) - maps.google
- H** [Edgewater Apartments](http://maps.google.com) - maps.google.com - (609) 3
- I** [Ebb Tide Suites](http://www.ebbtidesuites.com) - www.ebbtidesuites.com - (609) 39
- J** [Just Four Wheels: Ocean City](http://www.just4wheels.com) - www.just4wheels.com

[More results near Ocean City, NJ](#)

Here are the results within Google Maps:



As you can see, there are disparities between these results. We know there are two distinct algorithms for search, one for web search and one for Local Search. However, the difference between the two sets of Local results only makes sense if there are two different Local Search algorithms - one for the one box results that appear at the top of the web results page and a second that applies to Google Maps itself.

It has been explained to me that the results in the Local ten pack that appear at the top of the regular Search Engine Results Pages are influenced somewhat by the regular Google algorithm, while the results within Google Maps depend strictly on their Local Search algorithm. While this sounds logical and reasonable, I'm uncertain whether it is true or merely speculation.

And the regular web results



The screenshot shows a list of search results for 'Ocean City NJ Rentals'. Each result includes a blue title link, a short text description, and a green URL with file size, cache status, and similar pages link.

- Ocean City NJ Rentals-Condos and Beach Houses**
Choose your perfect **Ocean City, New Jersey** summer **rental** online 24/7. 100's of b
vacation homes. See photos, amenities and prices here.
www.bookthejerseyshore.com/ocean-city.asp - 26k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- Ocean City New Jersey Searchable Vacation Rental and Sale Prope**
Thousands of searchable **Ocean City, New Jersey** vacation **rental** and sale listings.
features up to date event calendar, live cams, and more.
www.oceancitynj.com/ - 4k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- Berger Realty - Ocean City NJ Vacation Rentals**
Ocean City, NJ Vacation **Rentals** and Beachfront Sales Leader!
www.bergerrealty.com/ - 35k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- Ocean City NJ Real Estate - Find Rentals in Ocean City NJ**
Ocean City NJ Rental - Specific examples of how to get the best value for you **Ocea**
NJ rental this year..It's all factored in the value. ...
www.rentalsinocnj.com/ - 9k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- Ocean City - Vacation Rentals .com**
Ocean City, New Jersey Vacation **Rentals**. ... Vacation **rentals** in **Ocean City, Ne**
Jersey are added and updated every week, so please bookmark us and visit ...
www.vacationrentals.com/vacation-rentals/Ocean-City-New-Jersey.html - 140k -
[Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- Ocean City, NJ Vacation Rentals - Home Sales by Don Doll - Coastal**
1 Ocean City, NJ Vacation **rentals** by Don Doll - Coastal Realty! 1-800-533-3889 Sp
in real estate property sales at the Jersey Shore.
www.coastalrealty.net/ - 2k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

Optimize for Local Terms in Google Web Search

In the regular search results, it's all about the algorithm, and the only way you can rank for competitive geographic terms is to be well-optimized for them.

Use all of your regular SEO best practices in optimizing for location focused terms, but give them a strong geographic spin. Currently, the 3 most important factors in ranking in Google are:

- Page title
- Content on page

- Text of the links pointing to the page

Make certain these all have a geographic focus to them. The more important your location is to your business, the more your geographic terms should be emphasized.

Even though the meta description and keywords are not important to your Google rankings, they can factor in to the algorithms of the other Search Engines. In addition, the description is displayed, along with the page title, in the Google SERPs. Note how the query terms are bolded in the title and the description.

This is what searchers see in the Google results for *Ocean City NJ rentals*. If it doesn't appeal to them and/or seem very relevant to their search query, they will not click on it.

[Ocean City NJ Rentals-**Condos** and Beach Houses](#)
Choose your perfect **Ocean City, New Jersey** summer **rental** online 24/7. 100's of beautiful vacation homes. See photos, amenities and prices here.
www.bookthejerseyshore.com/ocean-city.asp - 26k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

Here is the same page displayed in the Google results for a *Ocean City NJ Condos* query. The bolded words reflect that search.

[Ocean City NJ Rentals-**Condos** and Beach Houses](#)
Choose your perfect **Ocean City, New Jersey** summer rental online 24/7. 100's of beautiful vacation homes. See photos, amenities and prices here.
www.bookthejerseyshore.com/ocean-city.asp - 26k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

Pay Per Click Advertising for a Local Business

You generally have 2 choices for pay per click advertising in the big 3 Search Engines:

- Through their regular ad platforms, which display when web searches are made in Google, MSN and Yahoo.
- Through their local platforms - Google Maps, Yahoo!Local and Windows Live Local.

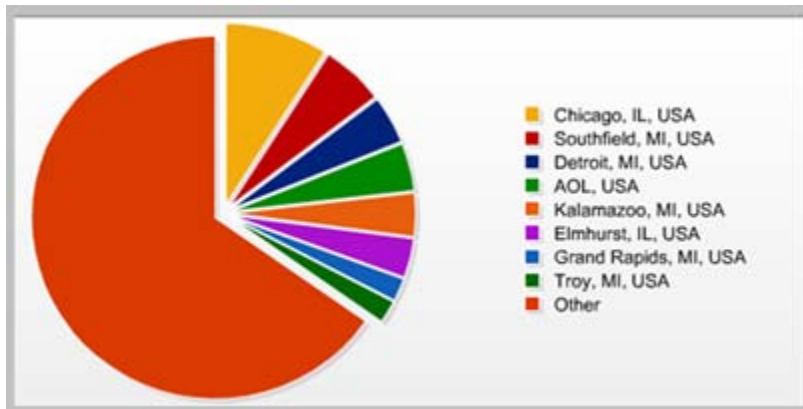
If you own a business, you know where you draw your customers from. If you are not the business owner, then you need to determine where to target your ads.

Do this by:

- Speaking to the business owner/manager
- Looking in the website tracker to see where website visitors are coming from. Many trackers will allow you to see visitors by state, city, zip code, region etc.
- Looking at your keyword research, log files and tracker to see what geo qualifiers people are using

Here's an example of what Index Tools can show you regarding the location of visitors to your website. For various reasons, this type of data is not very accurate, but it will show you trends in your marketplace.

Visitors by city:



City	Visits	%
Chicago, IL, USA	5,573	9.09%
Southfield, MI, USA	3,409	5.56%
Detroit, MI, USA	2,623	4.29%
AOL, USA	2,602	4.24%
Kalamazoo, MI, USA	2,365	3.86%
Elmhurst, IL, USA	2,147	3.50%
Grand Rapids, MI, USA	1,269	2.07%
Troy, MI, USA	1,246	2.03%
Allendale, MI, USA	1,223	1.99%
Indianapolis, IN, USA	1,121	1.82%

AdWords Geo-Targeting

For *farcasters* (those who are searching for something located in a place they hope to be in the future.):

For National Targeting

Some local businesses rely on people searching for them from elsewhere. Examples of this would be hotels, tourist attractions, real estate and cruises. For these, target your ppcs in regular AdWords campaigns by using geographic qualifiers, such as *Aspen rental car, aspen Colorado rental car, rent 4wd aspen co, aspen airport rent SUV.*

Set these up just as you do any other AdWords campaigns and groups, with like terms grouped together and pointing to landing pages that will give you good quality scores and high click-through rates. This will allow you to easily control your daily budgeting and keep your cost per click as low as possible, while still maintaining good positioning.

For Feeder Market Targeting

Some areas rely on a large number of customers coming to their location from other geographic areas. For example, Sante Fe draws many visitors from the Front Range of Colorado, Vail depends on a large number of skiers coming from Dallas and Houston and Grand Rapids is a huge feeder market for the Lake Michigan tourist town of Saugatuck. Your business may draw people from surrounding areas, as well.

Some places are the central service and products suppliers for outlying areas. For example, Grand Junction, Colorado is the biggest metropolis for 250 miles in any direction from it. It's the hub for all kinds of shopping, especially big ticket items like cars, farm equipment, appliances, home improvement materials, electronics, boats, etc. It is also where people from outlying areas must go for extraordinary shopping, like prom dresses and bridal gowns, specialized medical or legal services, air travel, and the like.

While these are the reasons people may travel to the big city (Grand Junction has about 300,000 people), they take care of other business and personal needs while there, as well. They'll shop at the mall and Super Walmart, stop by Petco, go out to lunch and dinner, get their car detailed and take care of a lot of other chores while there.

Think about where people are coming FROM to do business with you. Then, set up campaigns to target them where they live.

Strictly Local Business

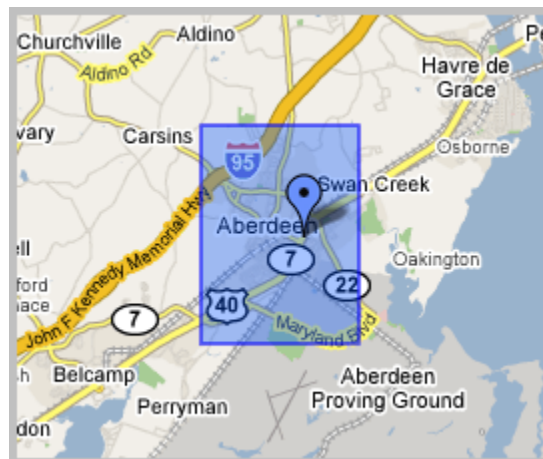
For ***nearcasters*** (those who are searching for something near their current location).

Some businesses are strictly local – a neighborhood handyman service, corner deli, health club, food market, dry cleaner, barber, carpet cleaner, etc. and they should be marketed that way. For them, it makes no sense to place their ads in front of a national audience or outside of their market area.

In these cases, you can choose other methods of designating where the people to whom you want your ads to appear are located. For these, you may target your ads by radius or by designating your own geographic area.

Google Designated Areas

With this method, you select an area that Google recognizes as a local market area. For example, this is what Google sees as the local marketplace for Aberdeen, Maryland:



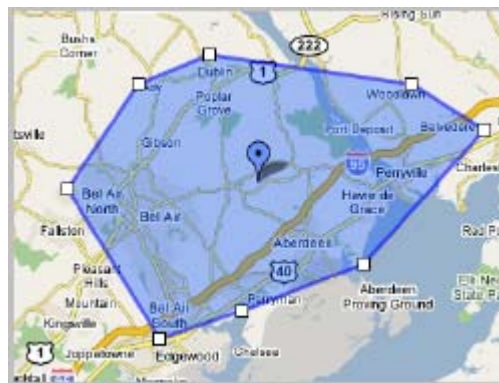
Radius targeting

With this method, you choose a radius in miles around your location where your ads will display. Here's a 20 mile radius around Aberdeen.



Custom Local Targeting

You may also create your own area where your ads will display:

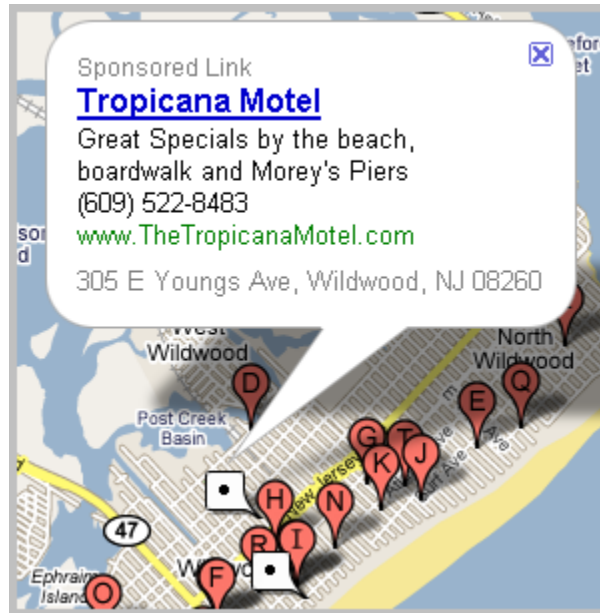
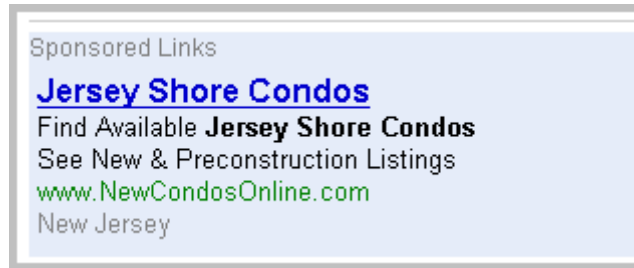


Local Business Ads

In Adwords, you can set up separate set of ads, Local Business Ads Here's Google explanation of where and how local business ads can appear.

<http://adwords.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=77418>

Here are some of the ways they may appear:



Ad Targeting with Google AdWords:

Regular campaigns - not geotargeted

- Use geo qualifiers in the terms you bid on.
- All searchers will see these, regardless of where they are located. You will get people visiting your website or calling you that are nearby you and people that are far away.

Regular campaigns – geotargeted

- Use geo qualifiers in the terms you bid on
- Only those searchers located in the areas you specify will see your ads. You may choose one or many locations where you would like your ads to appear.

Local Business Ads – not geotargeted

- You may bid on general terms, here, without geo-qualifiers, since people have already narrowed their search to a geographic area. Here's where you can bid on terms like *bakery, bagels and french bread*.
- These ads will appear in Google Maps results and are eligible to appear in other places, as well. (See note above.)
- These will appear to anyone searching for something with a geographic area in Google Maps, regardless of where the searcher is located.

Local Business Ads – geotargeted

- You may bid on general terms, here, without geo-qualifiers, since people have already narrowed their search to a geographic area.
- These ads will appear in Google Maps results and are eligible to appear in other places, as well. (See note above)
- You may specify the location people must be with in to see your ads.

Slam Dunks for Local Search

Create a tagline for your business that states what you do and where you do it. Display it in text form on your web pages and in your business profiles.

If you have the opportunity to name a business, use good keyword terms in the name. It will give you a natural advantage in searches of all types.

Create a directions page – write out driving - and if applicable walking and public transit directions to your place of business. In the content of the page, talk about what's nearby – landmarks, intersections, highway exit numbers, other businesses, subway stops, etc.

Use both the written out state (Florida) and the abbreviation (FL) on your pages.

Opt into pay per call advertising. It's more expensive than pay per clicks, but gets you on the phone with a customer, where you can

make the sale. Use day-parting with your pay per call campaigns, so that you are not paying for customers to call you when you aren't there to answer the phone.

Place your address in 2 places on the page – everyone uses the footer – place it somewhere else on your pages, as well, such as with in the content or in a sidebar.

Create a separate page for each of your business locations. Place that branch's address and phone number on the page and optimize the page for terms related to that locality.

Use your own internal linking to convey local link reputation.

List all the areas your business serves on at least one strong page of your site.

Make certain your listing is enhanced in the online version of the dominant print Yellow Pages for your area. Many people will begin with the online version of their local Yellow Pages when they search online.

This is speculative, but may help the Search Engine's to associate your website with your location. Link to your location on Yahoo Maps and Google Maps from at least one page on your site. Both offer a "Link to this page/map" URL that you can place on your web page(s).

Local Quick Tips

Optimize Your Business Profiles

Use the keywords for which you would like to be found, along with synonyms and related terms, in your profile descriptions.

Google Maps

If you do not classify yourself in Google Maps, they will use the established yellow pages taxonomy and what they can extrapolate about you from other websites to classify you.

Once you claim your listing, you may choose to classify your business in up to 5 categories in Google Maps. Choose wisely. Search in your location for the keywords you wish to be found for and see what

categories they display for that search. This is where you need to classify yourself.

Yahoo Local

Yahoo Local has City portal pages for many areas that serve as landing pages for those areas. If there is a portal page for your city, check to see which categories are listed on the main page and place yourself in that category first.

Yahoo!Local pages rank well in Google web search for many local queries, so pay particular attention to your profile there.

Yahoo Yellow Pages

This is one of the most used Internet Yellow Pages. Basic info is given here. Then, you are taken to Yahoo Local for details. One more reason to make certain your Yahoo!Local listing rocks.

Superpages

For many categories, the non sponsored listings don't appear until half way down the page. Buy your way to the top of the page with paid ads.

Superpages now offers pay per click ad distribution across a network that can include Google and Yahoo. Using a service like this can really simplify your ppc management.

YellowPages.com

Using the keyword terms you wish to be found for in your business name and/or in your business information.

Non sponsored listings appear alphabetically by name, so if your name starts with Z, consider paid ads.

YellowPages.com provides a *Respond to Reviews* feature for businesses to help them manage their online reputation.

Craig's List

Craig's List ranks well for many local searches, and even dominates in some areas. However, listings there expire in a month and must be manually resubmitted. It depends upon your business whether that's worth doing or not.

Reviews and Local Search

Both stellar and stinky reviews and ratings can have an enormous impact on Local Search. Why?

- Nearly every locally focused site enables and encourages reviews. Ratings are exactly what Local Searchers are interested in seeing.
- Once it's online, a review can live on forever and in most cases, you can't make it go away. You can only create something to help push it out of the spotlight.

Ratings and reviews can affect your rankings:

- Some sites allow users to sort the results by ratings. In their own personal algorithms, those searchers obviously give considerable weight to services with good reviews.
- Highly rated items rise to the forefront on some sites and those that are rated poorly are rarely seen.
- On some sites, like Yahoo Local, ratings factor into the algorithm. Good reviews help you rank better in the search results pages.
- The Search Engines use click through rates to measure search relevance. In places where reviews and ratings appear in your listing, bad reviews discourage clicks and good reviews encourage them. Therefore, good reviews can translate into better rankings in the SERPs.

Therefore it is critical to:

- Keep an eye on what is being said about you online and react appropriately.
- Do not dismiss a poor review as a one in a thousand griper-people are listening to them, so protect your reputation.
- Encourage and enable happy customers to review your business online.
- Depending upon the location and business, it may only take a few good reviews to smoke your competition. Very few people know how to manage their online reputation, so a little knowledge and action can go a long way.

Resources for Managing Your Online Reputation

Whitepaper on Online Reputation Management by Carrie Hill

Focuses on the hospitality industry, but applies to all businesses.

YellowPages.com – User Reviews section

Good, simple guidelines anyone can follow.

http://www.yellowpages.com/advertising/user_reviews

Resources for Local Search

Local Search Guide - IYP and Search Engine Who's Who

A combined effort by the Yellow Pages Association, The Kelsey Group, SEMPO and comScore .

<http://www.localsearchguide.org/>

Local Search Solutions – Local Search Properties

A nice list of locally focused vertical directories.

<http://www.localsearchsolutions.com/properties.php>

Understanding Google Maps and Yahoo Local Search

Mike Blumenthal's blog

<http://blumenthals.com/blog/>

Blizzard Internet Marketing Newsletter

Mary Bowling and Carrie Hill's Blog

<http://newsletter.blizzardinternet.com/>

Local Search articles

<http://search.freefind.com/find.html?id=8581681&pageid=r&mode=ALL&n=0& charset =UTF-8&bcd=%C3%B7&query=local+search>

Optimized!

Mary Bowling's blog

<http://www.marybowling.com>

Loc@I SEO Guide

Andrew Shotland's blog

<http://www.localseoguide.com/>

Screenwerk

Greg Sterling's blog

<http://gesterling.wordpress.com/>

The Kelsey Group

Focuses on IYPs and Local Search Verticals

<http://blog.kelseygroup.com/>

Yellow Pages Association

<http://www.ypassociation.org/>

Yellow Pages Commando

Dick Larkin's blog

<http://www.yppcommando.com/blog/>

SEO Book

Aaron Wall's blog

<http://www.seobook.com/blog>

Duct Tape Marketing

How-to articles on small business marketing

<http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/blog/>

Graywolf's SEO Blog

Michael Wolf's Blog

Interviews with 20 marketers on Local Search

<http://www.wolf-howl.com/local-search/local-search-interviews-information-and-resources/>

Local Search articles and information

<http://www.wolf-howl.com/local-search/local-search-articles-and-information/>

Official Google Blog

<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/>

Google Mobile Search Blog

<http://googlemobile.blogspot.com/>

Google Webmaster Central Blog

<http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/>

The future of Locals Search is likely to include a uniform way of labeling websites with locations. Here's information on some of the current methods of doing so:

HCards

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hcard>

Geocoding Pages for a Local Site on Webmaster World Forum

http://www.webmasterworld.com/local_search/3209639.htm

Geotagging

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GeoTagging>

Geo-Tag Generator

<http://www.geo-tag.de/generator/en.html> helps you create code to place on your site

About Mary Bowling

Mary Bowling is the senior SEO – Search Engine Optimizer - at Blizzard Internet Marketing, Inc. and is certified in Advanced Search Engine Strategies through Search Engine Workshops. By keeping her finger on the pulse of the Internet, she is able to develop Best Practices for the company and train others on implementing them on client websites. She also researches and develops new products and strategies for the company and is responsible for many successful marketing programs and strategies.