

# Everything You ***MUST Know*** About Search Engine Optimization



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# History of Local SEO

The days of just putting up a website with a description of your company and the products or services you offer, and maybe even running an e-commerce site, are long gone. Today, Internet marketing through your website or your company's blog is big business and every day new methods are being used to help business owners sell more and get their name out there faster and more efficiently. One of those methods is using local SEO marketing. Very simply put, local SEO is targeting your website and your online marketing efforts towards the local population rather than the global population. Upon closer look though, local SEO is much more than that.

When the Internet first started becoming popular in the late 90s people became excited about the fact that not only could they easily communicate with those in their own neighborhood and surrounding communities, but with a global market as well. For businesses this was big news because they were no longer constricted to the physical borders and boundaries that once kept them from reaching people halfway around the world. It wasn't just big news for businesses; it was big news for everyone!



There was a problem though. Not all businesses need to operate around the globe; and with many, it just doesn't make good business sense to even consider doing it. Say for instance, that you run a mortgage brokerage that's set up shop in a small town. You definitely want to reach the people in that town, because they'll most likely make up the majority of your customers. You set up a website that has the capacity to reach people outside of your community. But how far do you really want to reach? Within your own country is probably the farthest you can go, because mortgage rules vary so greatly from one country to another. You may be able to do a little business with the countries closest around you; but if your brokerage is located within the United States, you probably won't be able to handle the home loan of someone in India.

This is where the "big picture" concept of the Internet can become a problem. Your small business can quickly become lost in the shuffle, because search engines are simply trying to gather the best from around the entire world. Instead of increasing your target marketing, you've just exponentially increased your competition, and that can be brutal, especially if you rely on people actually walking through the door for a large part of your business. It wasn't just bad for businesses, but for customers too. Many consumers like to, or need to, buy from local businesses; but they don't have time to wade through several hundred pages on the Internet trying to find yours. It's frustrating to the business owner who can't reach their most loyal customers, and it's frustrating to customers who know they can do everything so easily online, they just don't know where to go to do it.

In 2010, Google came up with a solution to the problem. When a keyword for a business was entered (such as for a restaurant or plumber,) Google would insert a local section first, and then the regular and more global results underneath. The local section looked completely separate from the regular results and really only displayed basic information such as a company's name, address, and website link. This system was what Google called Places Pages and it was a very helpful alternative and gave both customers and businesses what they needed. However, it still had its problems.



Today, Google does much more than just put a link to the top local businesses for your search. Not only has the local information moved its position on the Google results page, there's also a lot more information included. Google pulls information such as the business's link from Google Places, but it also pulls information directly from the business' website. Google will now pull the headline for each business from the landing page on the website, and Google also uses the website to form its description of the business. This helps in two ways. First it gives the customer much more information about the local business at just a glance. Secondly, by pulling information directly from the business's website it actually helps that business's website gain page rankings. And page ranking is what it's all about, because that's what brings in more customers.

## Local SEO Stats and Facts

Aside from being a part of the Internet and having a somewhat lengthy history, what really is local SEO? Local SEO is a part of your website and online marketing that involves using specific techniques to get your name, your website, and your business out to those that are most likely going to see and use it – those that are already right in your own backyard. Still don't think that local SEO is all that big, or something that you don't need to concern yourself with yet? That kind of thinking is dangerous, and could make your business miss out on a large portion of the market.

When considering how important local SEO is for your business, consider these statistics:

- There are currently 50 million Google Places; of these, businesses such as restaurants, optometrists, dog parks, and transit stations (to name just a few,) are listed.

- Even with so many Google Places listings, still only 10% of the listings have been claimed.
- More than 4 million business listings have been taken by business owners on Google Places; of those 4 million, two million have been claimed in the United States.
- Google Place Pages are viewed millions of times every single day.
- 20% of searches that are done on Google have a location included with the keyword.
- Since 2008, the number of online local searches is up by 58%.
- The number of people reading local newspapers is down by a whopping 40% - 80%; meaning that if this is the only way you get your name out there, fewer people are seeing it now than they ever were before.

When a customer is looking for your business, or the product or service that your business offers, they'll use local SEO to find you. Let's use the mortgage brokerage example again. Customers who are not searching locally will simply enter "mortgage brokers" or "mortgage brokerages" into the search engine. These customers likely won't find your business, but as local SEO and local searches become more and more popular the number of customers *not* using local search features will dwindle. However, customers who *are* searching locally might enter "mortgage brokers Wichita," in which case your business will likely show up – if you're employing local SEO strategies and techniques in your online marketing strategy.

Still need more convincing? Read on to find out the seven biggest reasons why you need local SEO techniques for your business.

## **The 7 Biggest Reasons for Local SEO**

Truthfully, there are tons of reasons why you need local SEO for your business; but here are the six most important reasons.

### Local SEO is highly targeted and timely

This means that you are making sure that your business's name gets in front of the customers you want at a time when they really need it. Keeping with our example of a mortgage broker, no one is going to look for a broker until they need a home loan. So when they search for the keyword "mortgage broker Wichita," *and* you've employed proper local SEO strategies, you'll be one of the first ones they see- at the time they need a mortgage the most.

## Local SEO has the highest conversion rate of any type of advertising

The whole point of advertising is to reach a large number of people and convert them into customers for your business. Local SEO does this more effectively than any other kind of advertising because you're reaching the people who are most likely going to use your business – the people closest to you.

## Local SEO allows customers to find you easier when they're on their mobile phones

Local SEO doesn't limit itself to just desktop and laptop computers. It can be used on mobile phones too. Not only are all of the same local SEO tools used by the search engines on a mobile browser, but many apps are now available that are tailored to local businesses. A person logs into the app and enters their search terms, which will include the category they're looking for ("mortgage brokers") along with a location ("Wichita") and your business comes up. These apps are dedicated to local SEO and that alone should tell you just how important it is!



## Local SEO gives you a better return on your investment

We all know that you can spend hundreds on newspaper advertisements, more than that for radio ads and thousands upon thousands if you want to have a TV commercial. All that money and you have no idea whether or not it's actually going to get to your target audience or be successful! That's a lot of wasted money, money that your business probably can't afford. It costs you next to nothing to utilize a few local SEO strategies, even if you hire someone to do it for you. You spend less money to reach your target audience – it just makes good business sense.



## Much of local SEO is free

Many local SEO tactics do not cost anything to implement. Google Places currently doesn't charge anything to be listed in their service and inserting local keywords isn't going to cost you anything more than the time it takes to think about them. And that won't be much, because you already know what your business is and where it's located. All it takes is a little keyword research to find the best options for your website.

### 70% of local customers trust online business reviews

Online business reviews are huge in today's world. The concept is simple, really. A customer uses your business and then completes a write-up talking about their interaction with your company. These reviews tell if their experience with your company was good or bad and whether or not they would use you again. When potential customers are searching for your business that review will be one of the first things they see. And if that review is good, it means that more customers will see it and be inclined to use you when they need your product or services.

### Local SEO is greener than many forms of advertising

Because there are no flyers or pamphlets to print out and no newspaper ads to run, local SEO is much kinder to the environment. Think about it. Entering a few keywords into a blog or leaving comments on the blogs of others wastes very few resources. Local SEO is a much greener option and much more friendly to the environment. Even if that's not a big concern to you, it will be to your customers. Going green and trying to reduce, reuse and recycle is no longer just a hot trend – it's a lifestyle that millions have adopted. And many consumers now take environmental awareness into great consideration when choosing which businesses they deal with.

## **Strategies for Using Local SEO**

How can you implement local SEO strategies to make sure that they work and that you're reaping all those benefits just discussed? The good news is that there are many strategies you can employ with local SEO that will boost your page rank and your business. However, because there are so many different tricks to use and so many different routes to follow, it can take quite a lot of time to implement all of these strategies. You may soon find yourself solely devoted to your local SEO.

There are marketing consultants and SEO experts that you can contact that will spend the time inputting keywords and carrying out the strategies so that you can get back to actually running your business. We'll touch more on that later. First, you should know a little something about local SEO strategies and how to employ them, so that you can discuss with your marketing consultant which ones make the most sense for you to carry out and which ones they should be spending their time doing.

## Make sure your content really is king

'Content is King!' You'll hear that a *lot* when it comes to SEO, local or otherwise. And that's because it's true – content really *is* king. But it can't be just any old content that you threw up there just in order to have a site up and running. It needs to be *quality* content that gets you page rank and there has to be a lot of it.

Let's start with the first element your website content must have – quality. If you simply put up a bunch of pages that are keyword-stuffed it won't be interesting, informative, or helpful to visitors and they'll leave pretty quickly to find a website that is all of those things. If however, you can put up content that has a few rich keywords and long tail keywords, but mostly is full of informative and interesting content; your visitors will stick around to hear what you have to say. And, they'll most likely tell other people about what you have to say, too.



Getting your page ranked in the search results with your content depends highly on the keywords that you choose, *and this is one of the most important strategies to employ for local SEO*. Keywords really are everything. They're what a visitor types into a search engine in order to be led to your website. Because of this you must use them and you must know how to use them properly. No, don't just stuff your page with long keywords and phrases. But do know what kind of keywords to employ. Let's go back to the mortgage broker example again. You know that your target audience will be looking for a mortgage broker, so you already know that one of your keywords will be "mortgage broker." That's a great keyword for general SEO, but it doesn't do much for you locally. Instead, make "mortgage broker Wichita," your keyword and you now have a long tail keyword. This kind of keyword is especially favored by crawlers like Google and Bing.

One last word about content – you need to have quite a bit of it on your site in order for it to count with Google. Sites that don't have a lot on them simply don't rank very well, which will render all of your other SEO strategies useless. And, if your site doesn't have a lot of content, it won't take visitors too long to skim through it, see that they've read it all, and then move on. When it comes to content and local SEO, there is a lot to know and a lot to do. But content really is that important if you plan on using any other local SEO strategies and if you want them to work.

## Get Found in Google Places

Getting found on Google Places is essential for local SEO strategies. Google is giving priority to local businesses with a physical address, but you have to know how to do it and how to use it.

Actually getting your business acknowledged by Google Places is not hard to do. First, go to [www.google.com/local/add/businessCenter](http://www.google.com/local/add/businessCenter). You may have to sign up or sign in, depending on whether or not you have any other Google accounts. Once you're in though, it's an easy matter of filling out some text and drop-down boxes and you'll be well on your way to being found in Google Places. But don't just slap up your business name and phone number and hope that's enough to do the trick. To increase your page authority and to attract new customers, make sure that you include pictures, videos, coupons, hours of operation, payment methods accepted, and other information such as customer reviews and directories you belong to.



Google Places is the best resource to use in your local SEO, but there are other search engines that have similar setups too. Yahoo Local and Bing Local or just two of these and you should make sure that your business can be found in as many of these places as possible.

### Get Found in Directories

Aren't Google Places, Bing Local, and Yahoo Local all directories? Yes, they are, but they are map directories and you need to focus on getting into even more! There is no shortage of the number of different directories that you can sign up with online and you should sign on with as many as possible. Merchant Circle, City Search, and Yellow Pages are just a few of the directories available. The most important thing when you're filling out the information for a specific directory is to make sure that it all looks exactly the same as your Google Map listing. Consistency is very important.

### Get Customer Reviews

Online customer reviews are huge. This is because when a customer goes online and finds your business they have no way of actually knowing whether it's a good business or not. It's not like the old days when you could just walk into a store, ask a few questions and determine for yourself whether or not the company was a good one. Today, so many businesses are online but there's no way for a customer to tell beforehand whether or not that company is good, or if their product or service is worth the money. This is where customer reviews come into play – and they are huge in the online world. Instead of walking into the store and getting a sense for themselves, customers can now find online reviews and get an overall sense of whether the company and their product is good or not.

Customer reviews are also important for page authority. Google gives more authority to businesses that have a lot of customer reviews along with their listing. The bottom line is to get customer reviews whenever and wherever you can – Google doesn't seem to mind if they're located

right within Google or on third-party directory sites. Just get them and then maintain them. You want lots of reviews, but you need to remove negative reviews as these can harm your business greatly.

### Get Quality Backlinks

People become so intimidated at the thought of backlinks, but you shouldn't. A backlink is simply a link that's on another website that leads to your website. Google describes these links as being "votes" for your site and so, the more links you have, the more votes you have, and the more it looks to Google that people like your site. There are all kinds of different ways to get backlinks, from social networking sites to article marketing and syndication, to RSS submissions. The most important thing though is not how to get them – it's the kind that you get. Google doesn't necessarily place the most importance on how many backlinks you have but rather, the quality of them. It judges the quality of them by the authority of the page of the website where the backlink is left. Get backlinks and try to get as many as you can. But always, always make sure that any website that has a link to your website has a higher page authority than you do.

When it comes to getting backlinks pertaining to local SEO, you also need to make sure that the website your backlink is left on is also a local site. So maybe you're a mortgage broker in Wichita and you want a backlink on another website. You probably don't want it on a competitive lenders' site or another mortgage broker's, but you can get a backlink on a local Realtor's page. So that when people are looking for "Homes for Sale, Wichita" they'll also find your website for a mortgage broker in Wichita who can also help them finance the home they're looking for.

## Blog Commenting

Leaving comments on blogs works in a similar way to backlinks but instead of getting just your link on a website, you're getting your company's name and image (along with perhaps a link to your website.) Commenting is a great local SEO strategy and it's easy to do although it does take time. When commenting on blogs look for blogs that are in the same market as your company and that are also in your area. Google blogs is a great tool for this, because you can search specifically for blogs and easily find businesses in your area. Once you've found some blogs start reading! Look for intelligent posts and make sure that you can leave a comment (not all blogs will allow you to leave a comment.) When you've found a post that you'd like to leave a comment on, make sure that it is intelligent, related to your business and related to your keyword. Always make sure that you include the name of your business and if possible, a link to your website (not all blogs will allow you to leave a link either.)



Focusing on keywords, backlinks and blog comments are all great local SEO strategies to employ; but they all focus on indirect marketing techniques. While all these strategies will get your name and business in front of customers, you're still not actually "pushing" your product on your customers, or directly selling to them. You're simply telling them that you exist. But what about direct online marketing tactics? As a business, you're probably using some of them as well, such as pay per click and Google AdWords. Local SEO can be used in these areas too.

# Using Local SEO in Online Advertising

Advertising for local SEO employs the same techniques as any other kind of local SEO strategy. But the difference is that it applies them to your direct online advertising. Make sure that every pay per click advertisement, every Google AdWords campaign, and every Facebook ad campaign focuses on local SEO so that you can have all your online bases covered. Using local SEO in your online advertising can also be a great starting point for business owners that want to test drive local SEO and see how well it really works before diving in with all the other local SEO strategies.

Pay per click programs with Google AdWords is the most popular form of online advertising so that's the one we'll focus on here. But Yahoo! Search Marketing and Bing Ads are two other places where you'll want to set up local SEO advertising. There are two things to keep in mind when it comes to your Google AdWords campaign:

- bid on ads relevant to your area.
- bid on keywords that clearly define your product.

Bidding on ads relevant to your area simply refers to bidding on ads that include your city or town's name, along with surrounding cities and neighborhoods. Also make sure that the ad copy also includes those local SEO keywords. Bidding on zip codes is another great way to use pay per click advertising. Searching by zip codes hasn't become one of the main forms of searching so these keywords will usually have super low prices and you'll be narrowing your target audience down that much more. Using zip codes is one alternative way of describing where you are locally, but think of other ways to describe where you are as well. An online keyword generator can help you figure out which keywords will be best for your pay per click campaign, but you should always be trying to think of what your customers are searching for as well.

In addition to thinking of different ways to describe your business and its location, with pay per click advertising campaigns you also need to consider different ways to describe your product. So while the mortgage broker might have "mortgage broker Wichita," as a keyword, they might also have, "mortgage broker home equity loans," or "Wichita home equity loans." Both of these narrow down the terms and the target audience; and it gets the word out to those closest to you – which is what local SEO is all about.

Once you have your general local SEO going so that you can rank higher in the search engines, you then need to track those results to find out which ones work, and which ones don't. While tracking may sound like a simple matter of checking Google every day to see where you sit in the page rankings, it can actually get quite a bit more complicated than that. In the next section we'll look at how to adequately use different tracking methods to see which local SEO strategies are working best for you.

# Tracking Local SEO Results

Yes, going onto Google every day and doing your own search for your own keywords is a good way to see where you are in the page rankings (just make sure that you're signed out of Google first, otherwise you'll get altered results.) But you can also use innovative ways to track your results and these will also help you when creating backlinks, leaving comments and when using other local SEO strategies.

## Custom URLs

If you've ever visited a website and clicked on a link and "redirecting" appeared on the screen or in the address bar, you've just clicked on a custom URL. These are a great tool for tracking your local SEO results. However, this way of tracking is also pretty technical and not only requires some time but also a lot of know-how, so you might want to think about handing that portion off to a web or marketing consultant.

## Separate Domains

Separate domains work very similar to the way custom URLs do. A business owner, or their marketing consultant, sets up different domain names in addition to the main website and with all additional domain names including the local SEO keywords. So the owner of the "mortgagebroker.com" site would also buy the domain names "mortgagebrokerwichita.com" and "homeequityloans.com," and other related domains. Once a visitor comes to that site, they are then redirected to the main site. These, while simpler than custom URLs, still require some technical knowledge so those too are best handed off to someone else if you have neither the time or interest in doing it yourself.

## Coupon Codes

Coupon codes have been around as long as print advertising has been, and now it's spilled over into the world of online local SEO strategies as well. With coupon codes you simply enter a code onto a promotional item or coupon and have the customer quote that code (or just hand in their coupon) at the time of purchase. This way, the business owner can see which ad campaigns are working, where customers are and how they're most likely to be reached. And the same can work for your local SEO. When you leave a comment on a blog for instance, you could refer to a mortgage guide e-book that can be downloaded from your site for free. To get it the customer has to enter the coupon code you've left within the comment of the blog. Not all blogs will allow comments but you can enter coupon codes into any of your Google AdWords campaigns and into your customer reviews too.

# 3 Things Your SEO Consultant Must Have

Now you know all about local SEO and why it's so important, along with some of the strategies you can use to better your local SEO, and even how to use it in your advertising campaigns. By now, you're most likely a little overwhelmed at the idea of even starting your local SEO project, never mind actually doing it. Yes, carrying out local SEO strategies and techniques is tedious and takes a great deal of time. That's one of the key fundamentals of it actually, because Google is looking for consistent local companies that they want to promote.

Because of this, most businesses outsource their SEO and marketing needs so that they can get back to business and still make sure that their SEO needs are being taken care of. When hiring an SEO consultant there is a lot to know and we'll cover most of it in the next section outlining questions to ask any consultant you're considering dealing with. But before you start asking those questions, you need to make sure that your SEO consultant has these three things:

## Referrals from other clients

You need to make sure that this is more than just a written statement that says, "I hired ABC Consultants in March 2015 and would hire them again." Local SEO is a long process that involves many different aspects and elements. You need to be able to actually speak to past clients of the consultants and find out how capable the consultant was, if their work brought results, and yes, if the person would hire them again. You also want to ask about any problems that arose and how they were dealt with. There are always going to be small problems that crop up and need to be dealt with and you need to make sure that your consultant knows how to handle them.

## Open communication about what they're doing

For some reason, some consultants like to keep what they're doing somewhat secret and will give the business owner vague descriptions about what's being done. It might be because they think this makes them indispensable to the owner and keeps them relying on the consultant's services but really it's just bad business practice. It's your website and your business's online presence that the marketing consultant will be handling and if it's done incorrectly, or in a way that you don't think reflects what the business is, that's a big problem. You need to make sure that your consultant is willing to sit down with you and go through every single strategy they plan on using. Then they need to go further and tell you why they're using that strategy and what they're going to have to do to employ that strategy (whether it's gathering customer reviews or leaving comments on blogs.) Then they need to get your approval and you should be informed of any time those strategies are updated or revised. It's all about communication and the two of you need to have a completely open forum at all times.

## A consistent effort

As mentioned earlier, to Google it's all about consistency and the whole reason you're hiring a consultant in the first place is because you don't have the time to be that consistent yourself. You want to make sure that the consultant does not overbook themselves to the point where they no longer have the time to continually work on your website's local SEO. Be very clear with your consultant that you'll need them to devote a certain number of hours per day or per week and make sure you get a consultant that not only promises that, but also seems comfortable with it. If they pause and need to sit for a minute to figure things out in their head they're actually trying to figure out where they're going to fit you in. They're overbooked and they won't have time for you, now or in the future; and it's time to find someone who will.

# 7 Questions to Ask a Local SEO Consultant

Along with the top three things to look for in a local SEO consultant there are also 10 key questions you need to ask. Of course, feel free to ask how long they've been in business and whether they're a licensed business. But when it comes to local SEO-specific questions these are the ones you have to make sure you don't miss.

## 1. What are you going to need from me in order to make my business successful?

This doesn't refer to the keyword research you've done, or directories you've already starting submitting to. What this question means is "how much of my time will you take every day/week?" A good local SEO consultant will need to sit down with the client and learn about their business, their current needs and what they're looking for out of their local SEO campaigns.

## 2. Will I have control access to all accounts created for my business?

This one may seem obvious: you need to be in complete control with anything that is done to or for your business. But you'd be surprised how many business owners allow consultants to set up profiles for them on Google, Bing, Yahoo, yellow pages, and other directories and never ask for the sign-in names used, passwords, or other critical control admin information. This is a crucial error because if you and your consultant part ways you'll be left to hire someone else to do all that work all over again for you. And depending on the directory, if your business is already listed, you might not even be able to do that much. Make sure you always have control.

## 3. Why are spamming sites so successful?

Again, you'd be amazed by the number of spam sites that do not comply with the search engine rules and still manage to make it to the top of the page rankings overnight. These techniques are very, very risky and can be the end of your business if one of the search engines finds out you're using them and shuts you down. Still, a good SEO consultant needs to know what those illegitimate techniques are so that they know how to avoid them.

## 4. What is your typical return on investment for your clients?

Here you're really asking what the consultant is going to give you for your money and they should be able to say something other than "a rate of 50% increased traffic." That's just simply too vague and doesn't really give you any kind of guarantee. Instead, look for a consultant who will say something like "I'll generate five actual mortgage customers in the range of \$150,000 - \$250,000; and I'll get you 20 qualified leads in 60 days." Now those are results that can be measured and that the consultant can be held accountable for should they not follow through.

## **5. How are you going to track your results?**

Again, you need to have a measuring stick for the consultant's work and you need to know that the consultant is doing their job by tracking SEO results. Look for a consultant that will track increased page rankings on targeted local keywords, an increase of quality traffic to your site and an increase in emails as well as phone calls to your business. What your consultant should really be looking for and what you'll probably notice most, is an increase of business – and that's always easily track-able for any business owner!

## **6. Will you be my point of contact?**

You need to make sure that you're going to be dealing with the consultant and no one else. You don't want your account being handed off to someone else, especially an assistant or someone that's not an SEO experienced professional. A lot can get lost in translation and even though local SEO isn't rocket science, you still need to make sure that every step of the way that the qualified individual you first spoke with is the one overseeing and carrying out every single SEO strategy. Otherwise, you really might as well have done it yourself.

## **7. What happens to the content on my website and the secured links should we part company?**

Some SEO consultants deliver results because they have hundreds of their own websites. They use these websites to generate backlinks for your website and to ultimately increase your page rank. When it's time for renewal, they tell you that should you choose not to renew the contract with them they will remove these links and essentially, you'll lose the page rank that you've gained thus far. They also sometimes threaten to do the same thing with the content, saying that they'll take it all down. Again, this is horrible business practice and you should never work with someone because you feel blackmailed into it. Make sure that once any local SEO work is done it's there for good and yours to keep.

# Conclusion

Implementing all of the different local SEO techniques that are available to help your business be found by local customers is essential to your business. But you're a business owner and you're busy doing just that – who has time to worry about their local SEO? That's why there are many SEO consultants that are experts in the field. These experts will not only be able to take the time you don't have to carry out those local SEO strategies, but they will also be able to give you better insights and tips on how to get it to work best for you.

# Next Steps

Thank you again for downloading this free report. We hope that you found it useful and it has given you the information you need to help you better understand the most important things you should know about using local SEO to improve your local page ranking for your business.

If you would like additional assistance please contact us at:

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