

# Local Search Engine Optimization

## A Mission Critical Investment

The following whitepaper discusses the value of Local Search Engine Optimization in today's business landscape. In particular, we discuss how the mechanics of Local SEO create extreme added value when compared to other high value advertising, such as print, radio, and television ads.

### Preface

A long, long time ago, in 2004, the internet was essentially a resource of virtual information. There was no iPhone, no Yelp, no Google+ Local. The web was essentially just linked pages and files, and the 'virtual' world of the web was still very much separate from the 'real' world. Flash forward to today and the online landscape is very different.

This is because *Google Local* launched in 2004, seeking to index not just every web page online, but every business offline as well. In 2007 the iPhone was launched, and the web really started to get local. Computers stopped residing on our desks at work, or our laps at home. Now they were in our pockets, and we wanted to use them not only to search the internet, but explore the 'real', physical world around us.

Mobile computing exploded after that. Google's Android phones were right behind Apple's iPhones, launching late in 2008 and opening up the world of smartphones to everyone. In 2010 wireless carriers started transitioning to 4G mobile data, promising ultra-broadband speeds to mobile devices everywhere, and today we see phones sporting hardware specs that put the desktops of just a few years ago to shame.

And all the while, as high powered computing went from desks to pockets in just a few short years, the whole dynamic of online search changed *drastically*. There were more searches conducted on cell phones alone last year than all searches combined in 2001. 82% of smartphone owners used a search engine as their primary tool to research purchases and they're doing so on the go, not only on their way to shop, but spending an average of 15 minutes on their smartphones while in the store.

The reason for this drastic change in online behavior is that mobile phones work so differently from desktops and laptops. Consumers on smart phones are on the go, and ready to call or walk into stores now. And they expect the shopping experience to be augmented by their phone with online reviews, insider tips, price comparisons, images and more.

So what does all this mean for your business? It means that if you have a brick and mortar store, then just having a website isn't cutting it. You need to ensure that when potential customers search you're your product or service online, it's your website and business listings that show at the top of Google, instead of your competitors. This is achieved through a process known as Local Search Engine Optimization, or Local SEO for short.

Local SEO is going to help your business to show prominently when users search for your products and services. And not only does Local SEO focus on big Search Engines like Google, but it also helps promote your business on the hundreds of other Internet Yellow Pages (IYP's), Online Review Sites, and other niche services that cater to Local Search.

Beyond just making your business easier to find online, Local SEO also boosts your brands appeal by augmenting your web presence with high quality images, great reviews, online coupons, and other bonuses that get the attention of your customers. This all leads to more traffic, and more importantly, *more sales for you.*

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## Executive Summary

When it comes to customers seeking local products and services, Local Search is king:

- 24% of Google's ~5 Billion daily searches are for local businesses. That's 1.25 billion local searches daily.
- A Local Search study by The Nielsen Company, an industry leader in global information and measurement, found that:
  - 73% of consumers said they use a search engine to find a local business from which to buy a product or service.
  - 50% of consumers said they used an Internet Yellow Page (IYP) such as YellowPages.com to find a local business from which to buy a product or service.
  - And 18% of consumers said they used an Online Review Site to find a local business from which to buy a product or service.
- The same Nielsen study showed that of the top 10 ways in which users found local products and services, Search Engines, IYP's and Review Sites ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, respectively, and were the only online marketing channels present.
- Not only is Local Search a huge influencer on consumer behavior, but a recent study by Yext, an industry leader in Local Search, shows that almost half of all businesses have incorrect or missing information in the Local Search results. On average:
  - 18% of businesses have an incorrect or missing phone number online.
  - 19% of businesses lack a link to their website.
  - 37% of businesses have a missing or incorrect business name listed.
  - 43% of businesses have a missing or incorrect address.
  - And 14% of businesses are missing from the Local Search listings entirely!
- Overall, this bad data is costing local businesses ~\$10.3 billion per year.
- A properly executed Local SEO campaign will optimize the top Local Search platforms; Search Engines, IYP's and Review Sites, and ensure the accuracy of all Local Search listings.
- A properly executed Local SEO campaign also provides 3X the ROI, or more, of a traditional offline marketing campaign.

## The Importance of a Local SEO Campaign

Local Search has been growing at a rapid pace, fueled by smartphone adoption, recently accounting for nearly 1 in 4 Google searches, nearly 1.25 billion per day. The big difference between regular search and Local Search is that Local Searches tend to be done on the go, and the searchers are looking to buy a product or service immediately.

Since Local Search users are on the move, they tend to purchase from the first business that suits their need, spending relatively little time shopping around. This makes it absolutely critical for local businesses to rank highly in Local Search, and to ensure that their information like phone numbers, addresses and business hours are present and correct. Even so, nearly half of all businesses have incorrect or missing information in the Local Search listings.

## The Trinity of Local Search

A recent study by The Nielsen Company, an industry leader in global information and measurement, showed that of the top 10 sources which consumers used to find local products and businesses, only 3 were online platforms. These sources were *Search Engines, Internet Yellow Pages* and *Online Review Sites*.

The other 7 sources are separate ad platforms, requiring 7 discrete marketing campaigns to target effectively. However, unlike the other 7 sources, the 3 big online sources, which account for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> most important platforms, are all just facets of one marketing type: Local Search Engine

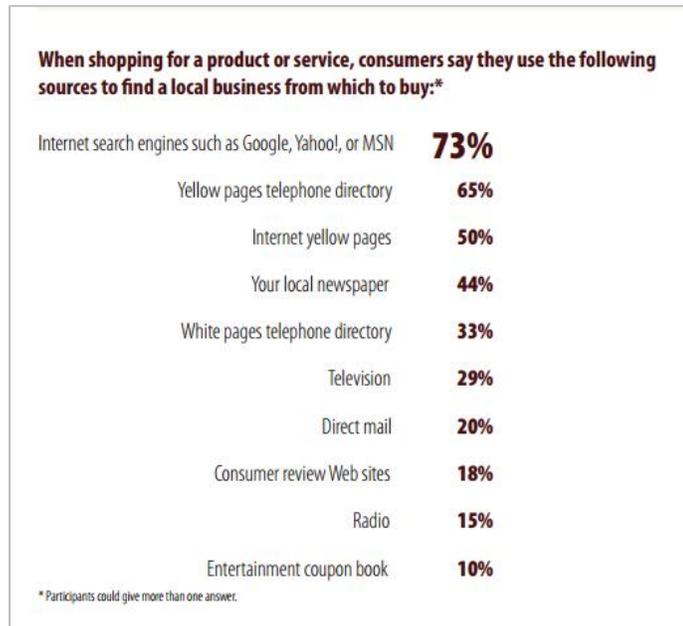


Figure 1 Nielsen Study Findings

Optimization.

This means that while targeting the 7 offline sources, including paid advertising platforms like newspapers, television, direct mail and radio, would result in a larger overall presence, there are 2 huge disadvantages:

1. Each of these offline sources requires its own marketing campaign, meaning a lot of work and expense.
2. Each of these offline sources is a form of paid advertising, meaning that as soon as you stop spending money, the ads turn off.

Conversely, targeting all 3 online channels, which account for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> most important sources, has 2 huge advantages:

1. A Local SEO campaign will target Search Engines, IYP's and Review Sites through the same channels, allowing your company to reach all 3 big online platforms for the cost of just 1 marketing campaign.
2. Local Search Optimization will permanently boost your Local Search presence for a 1 time payment. Unlike a paid ad such as a radio ad, which ends when you stop paying for it, the search optimized listings created on the Search Engines, IYP's and Review Sites will remain there for free once created.

Based on this data the ROI of a Local Search Engine Optimization campaign exceeds any other marketing campaign many times over.

## How Local SEO Works

The power of Local Search Engine Optimization lies in its ability to cheaply and efficiently create visibility on the 3 top sources that consumers use to find products or services.

The reason for this is that the foundation of a Local SEO campaign lies in the mechanics of Google. Google's Local Search results, which consist of lists of local business with their names, addresses and phone numbers, rank a bit differently than regular web pages.

When Google returns its search results, it's basically looking at 2 factors; whether a business listing is relevant, and how high the business should rank in the search results.

The 1<sup>st</sup> factor, relevancy, is easy. If you Google "Pizza" while located in Boston, Google knows you're looking for pizza places in Boston. Since Pizza restaurants tend to have the word pizza all over their Local Listings and websites, Google knows who sells pizza and who doesn't.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> factor, ranking, is a bit more complicated. Google's users expect the best results at the top, so Google needs to look at what we call ranking factors to decide which pizza place deserves to rank in 1<sup>st</sup> place, which deserves 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and so on.

When it comes to Local Search, there are a number of ranking factors that we can't control. For example, the number one ranking factor for Local Search is location. A pizza place in Boston will always beat a pizza place in the suburbs, because the Boston location is more local.

There are a number of ranking factors that we *can* affect though, and the main targets of our Local SEO campaign will primarily be the ranking factors known as *citations*, *backlinks* and *reviews*.

### Citations, Backlinks, Reviews and Local Search Rank

When it comes to actually ranking the pizza restaurants around Boston, Google wants to put the best pizza restaurant first, and in Google's mind, the most popular pizza restaurant in Boston is most likely the best.

So how does Google determine the most popular pizza restaurant in Boston? That's where citations, backlinks and online reviews come in. A citation is an online instance of your name, address, and phone number. A backlink is any link that goes to your website. Online reviews are reviews of your business online. Each of these acts as a vote of popularity for your business,



Figure 2 Google's Local Search Results

and in general, the more votes you have, the higher your business listing will rank in Local Search.

### **How Local SEO Achieves So Much Value**

The reason a Local SEO campaign achieves so much value is that citations and backlinks can be created very cheaply and quickly by creating business listings on Search Engines and Internet Yellow Pages, and Online Review Sites build not only citations and backlinks, but reviews as well.

So not only is creating search engine optimized business listings on IYP's and Review Sites building a presence on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> most popular sources that consumers use for finding local products and businesses, but it's also providing the extra value of boosting your Search Engine ranking, and Search Engines are the number 1 source of information for local products and services for consumers.

As if this added value wasn't enough, the same tools are used to automate the creation of all 3 types of listings. This means that it costs very few additional resources to optimize all 3 Local Search sources than it would to target just 1 of them.

### **Key Recommendations and Next Steps**

- To determine how much of a game changer Local SEO could be for your business, go on Google and search for your business, not by your brand name, but by the generic keywords your customers would search by. Ask yourself:
  - Am I happy with my visibility on the front page of Google?
  - Do my reviews make me look good?
  - Is my business information correct?
- If you answered no to any of these questions, we can provide a free consultation on how to fix these problems, and many more. Just reach out to us at [clients@prestosocial.com](mailto:clients@prestosocial.com) or on our site at [www.PrestoSocial.com](http://www.PrestoSocial.com).
- We'll provide you with a free report and consultation. There are no catches, and even if you choose not to pursue Local SEO Marketing, at least you'll be fully informed on this game changing marketing strategy.