



Search Engine Optimization Tips

Not so long ago, the best way to make sure customers could find your business was to list your phone number in the yellow pages. Today customers are just as likely to use their phones—but not to call you. They’re finding businesses with map apps and mobile web searches.

Searches by customers using smartphones to find businesses “near me” shot up 146% in the last year alone. Even on desktop computers, search results now depend on a searcher’s geographic location. For example, when someone searches for “dog walking,” they’ll see a list of dog walking businesses close to their current location.

To stay competitive, you need to make sure local customers can find your business no matter how they’re searching. Here are six tips for boosting your business’ rank in the most important search engines and mobile apps.

1. Complete your Google My Business page.

This is an essential first step in any effort to improve your search-engine optimization (SEO). To make sure Google’s search engine and Google Maps can find your business, fill out all the fields on your Google My Business page. You’ll get an even bigger benefit if you add photos of your location, products or staff.

2. Claim your local business listings.

While Google is by far the biggest search engine, the dozens of other local directories are also important—from Bing to Yahoo, with Citysearch and Foursquare in between. You should verify your business listings with as many of these online directories as you can. Not only will you reach customers using these

individual directories, your business listing's big footprint will boost your overall search ranking.

3. Correct your NAP (Name, Address, Phone number).

Search engines love consistency. When Google sees the exact same address consistently associated with the exact same phone number, it knows it's found a relevant result for an actual business. On the other hand, errors or even minor inconsistencies (like abbreviated street names) can confuse search algorithms and signal that your business info is less trustworthy. Make sure your business' name, address and phone number are always updated and correct whenever they appear, and don't forget to check listings for your website address and hours of operation as well.

4. Make your website mobile friendly.

As more customers use their smartphones to search the internet, Google is helping them by prioritizing mobile-friendly websites in search results—and demoting sites that aren't mobile friendly. Your business website needs to look as good on phones and tablets as it does on desktop computers. You can see how you're doing with [Google's free mobile-friendly test](#).

5. Create local content.

Publishing a blog on your website is a good way to connect with customers and share your expertise as a small business owner. It also shows search engines that you're an authority in your field and your community. Write about topics that are relevant to your local customers, and use the name of your city or region in your blog's text, headlines and page titles.

6. Encourage customer reviews.

Reviews on Yelp, Facebook and other social media sites will improve your reputation with search engines and get the attention of potential customers. Don't be shy about asking loyal customers to post reviews of your business. And if you get a bad review, don't get angry or defensive—use the opportunity to demonstrate good customer service with a gracious response.