



**HOW TO  
GET MORE  
LOCAL CUSTOMERS  
WITH  
LOCAL SEARCH  
RANKINGS**

You likely already know that a majority of potential new customers and leads to your business will first look online to find the local services they need or a problem they need solving, whether it be for a plumber, a fitness instructor, a landscaper, a party planner ... basically anything!

In fact, the statistics are quite staggering ... **97% of people** who needed to find a local business for their needs first initiated some sort of search online!

Over 85% of people who look up the location of a business do so by using Google Maps.

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*In a nutshell: To thrive in the “real world”, you MUST have an online presence in local search.*

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## What is Local Search?

Local search is when people type in (or speak) a question where they need to find something that has local intent.

For instance, “Find pizza near me” is an obvious local search. A search engine like Google knows that the person is looking for a pizza restaurant, and in a location near where they spoke into their cell phone (or near their home if on a computer).

Google will tailor their search results to both nearby restaurants and those restaurants with excellent ratings, as you can see below:



pizza joint near me



All Maps Shopping News Images More Settings Tools

About 95,500,000 results (0.80 seconds)



Rating Price Hours Your past visits

### Rocco's Pizza Joint

3.6 ★★★★★ (56) · \$\$ · Pizza Delivery  
162 7th Ave  
Basic local pizzeria



### Gino's Pizza

4.2 ★★★★★ (42) · \$ · Pizza  
81 Catherine St  
Chain eatery serving pizza & pasta



### Little Italy Pizza

4.2 ★★★★★ (236) · \$ · Pizza  
11 Park Pl  
Counter for slices of pizza & calzones



[More places](#)

This list of three businesses is known as the “local pack”, and includes the name of the business, their reviews on Google, their business address, typical price and an image of their business. Google also shows a map of where they are located.

There is great chance that a majority of hungry people looking for pizza will go to one of these places listed. Some may first look at the reviews. Others will view their menu. You can certainly bet that they wouldn't receive even half as much business if they weren't online.

So, the next question is: **How do I get listed here?**

# Getting Listed in the Local Search Results

Google states right on their page how they determine local ranking. They are:

**Relevance** - How well does your business match what the user is searching for?

**Distance** - How far away is your business from where the user searched?

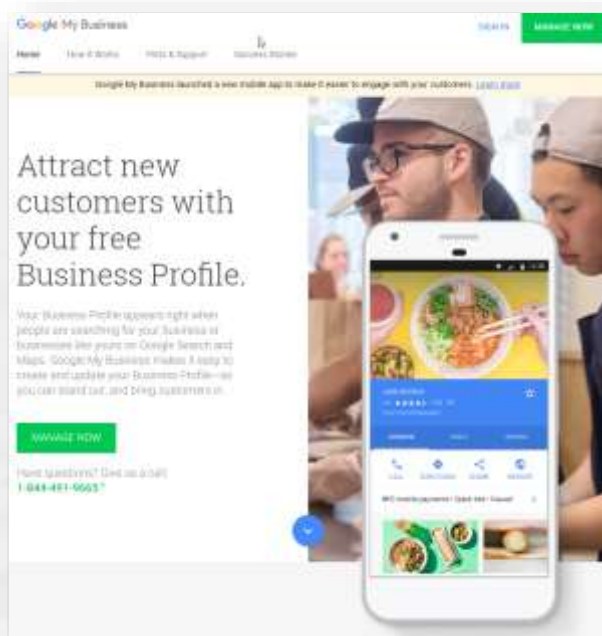
**Prominence** - How well-known is your business?

Before we go further into how Google determines local ranking, you first need to register to be listed in the results in the first place!

There are three main steps to getting your business listed in local search:

## 1. List your business in Google My Business

<https://www.google.com/business/>



You will first set up an account and verify your business (usually through a PIN number or physical mail to make sure your mailing address and business is real).

While waiting for the verification, you can add details such as:

- 📍 Your business name
- 📍 Hours of operation
- 📍 Photos of your business
- 📍 Your address
- 📍 Your location on Google Maps
- 📍 Your services – different businesses will fill out different types of services
- 📍 Your phone number
- 📍 Your website URL

There may be a chance that your business is already listed in Google local search without your knowledge. This is because ANYBODY can add a business to Google Maps.

Perhaps a previous customer recommended you to a friend, and that friend remarked that they couldn't find you on Google Maps. All they would have to do is click where you are and add your information. Is it accurate? Who knows!

This is why it is important to not only have a presence online, but to make sure you claim and control the business listing. This is not only for Google Maps, but also for dozens or even hundreds of review sites, directory listings and social sites.

Don't forget, you also have Bing Places for Business, Yahoo Local Listings and Apple Maps! While they definitely don't get the traffic that Google gets, it may still be worth setting them up on these search engines as well. Traffic is still potential customers to your business.



Now is a good time to mention **relevance** as one of Google's ranking factors. In order to be as relevant as possible, your listing must be as detailed as possible. This means making sure your business is in the proper category, adding a detailed business description, photos, attributes, ... anything that describes your business.

One important factor are attributes. Think of these as tags for your business. If you own a pizza restaurant, you can add certain attributes such as:

- 📍 Outdoor seating
- 📍 Wheelchair-accessible entrance
- 📍 Italian cuisine
- 📍 Family friendly
- 📍 Live music
- 📍 Free wi-fi

There are also subjective attributes, which Google collects from reviews, conversations and mentions around the web. These could be things such as:

- 📍 Popular for lunch
- 📍 Good for groups
- 📍 Serves great dessert
- 📍 Good for kids
- 📍 Cozy atmosphere

Google also talks about **distance** as a local ranking factor. This one is easy to understand. The closer a searcher is to your location, the better the chance you will rank high. Location can either be what they type in (ie "*Pizza places on 42<sup>nd</sup> street*") or location data from their phone.

There is one caveat, though. If Google judges that a business that is farther away is more relevant to a search, it will rank that business higher. This is why you need to make sure your Google My Business listing is detailed and optimized.

Once you have your local listing on Google verified, published and claimed (if it existed before), you now have the ability to show up in the local results.

However ... it's not as simple as this. If your competitors are already listed, you won't be able to suddenly appear at the top of the listings. In fact, you might not even show up in Google Maps.

So how do you grow the power of your listing so it shows up? Well, now it's really time to get to work!

## 2. Gain Citations for Your Business



Merely having a listing on Google Maps and an account with Google My Business just announces that your business exists. Now you have to prove that you ***“mean business.”***

To do that, you need to have citations pointing to your business. What are citations?

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*Citations are directory and review listings for your business.*

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Citations act as “mentions” and “votes” from other authority websites and reviewers, which helps you begin ranking in the local search listings.

Examples of citation sources include:

- 📍 Angie’s List
- 📍 Facebook
- 📍 local.yahoo.com
- 📍 Yellowpages
- 📍 Local.com
- 📍 BBB
- 📍 Foursquare
- 📍 Yelp
- 📍 Superpages
- 📍 Manta
- 📍 Indeed
- 📍 Tripadvisor

There are literally thousands of places to gain citations, most of them specific to a type of business and niche.

For instance, if you are a car dealership, you would also include your business listing in places like Edmunds.com and Autotrader.com.

If you are a pizza restaurant, you would also list your business in Zomato.com and Localeats.com.



Don't forget citations and business directories specific to your area! For instance, if you were a pizzeria in New York City, you might also consider listing your business in a local resource such as NYCGo.com.

Just like Google Maps, you may have to claim your business on these review websites. And there could be dozens of them. Some may be accurate about your business, while others may have wrong or misleading info. You won't know who left a review about you or who created your listing in the first place until you do a search for your business.

### 3. Customer Reviews

Citations will definitely give you a better chance to rank in local search, but it might not be enough, especially if you have competitors who want to rank as well for that coveted "local pack" on the first page of Google search.

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*To give power to your citations, you need positive customer reviews.*

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Reviews are important not only for the obvious benefit of customer feedback, but also because it shows that your business is popular enough for people to want to leave reviews in the first place!

While naturally occurring reviews are great, simply asking your customers for reviews is effective as well. It's amazing how many businesses don't even think of something this simple!

#### Asking for Customer Reviews

The most visible review system is Google itself, so it's most effective to start here.

To encourage your customers to leave reviews:

- 📍 Ask for a review in a follow-up email (after you know they are satisfied!)

- 📍 Create business cards with review instructions on the back
- 📍 Place a review button on your website ... and list the reviews once you have some
- 📍 Ask on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc
- 📍 Give instructional flyers to satisfied customers as well

For reviews, it is definitely best to develop your own review strategy. For instance, will you devote a certain time of day to looking up any new reviews? Every day? Once a week? Which websites?

How and when will you ask for customer reviews? If you are a limo company, asking right after the ride is best, because it is fresh in their minds.

If you a home improvement company, it's best to ask a week or so after everything is complete. That way, your customer will have had time to enjoy their new addition or renovation, and you can phone or email them for a follow-up. During that time, you can find out if they love everything or if there are some problems. If there are problems, you want to get those fixed before asking for an online review!

How about negative reviews? You can't please everybody, but you can respond to all reviews, especially negative ones. Responding in a proactive way that attempts to fix the problem not only has the potential of turning a bad review around, it also shows new customers that you care enough to respond and try to provide a solution. This gives people more confidence in you and your business.

## Putting it All Together

Now that you know how to get listed in the local search results, it's time to put everything together. Though we haven't mentioned it much, the final piece of the puzzle is your own business website, as well as your presence around the web.

We will now cover Google's third factor in local ranking: ***prominence***. That is, the more well-known and popular a business is, the higher it will rank.

How does Google determine prominence? It all comes down to the strength of your brand. The authority and relevancy of your website is one factor. If your website ranks well on the regular search results, it will also rank well in local search.

Mentions from other websites, journals, media sites, reviews and citations also contribute to this.

Ask yourself, if you were a hungry tourist looking for food, and you quickly checked Google for nearby places to eat, would you go to Dominos or Joe's Greasy Grub? More than likely it would be the familiar brand name (if you like Dominos!)

You need to be that familiar brand name, at least in your area. To do this, you need a complete strategy of website link building, citations, reputation management, social engagement and content syndication. Let's briefly explore each one.

## **Your Website & Links**

Your business website is still king, even in local search, even though your local listing and your "organic" listing (the listings in a regular Google search) are separate.

The authority and strength of your website is a ranking factor, as it helps determine the prominence of your brand.

How do you strengthen your website? This is a completely different method that will take a book to explain, but for the purposes of ranking in local search, there are a few common practices to follow:

**Links from other sites** - Have other strong, authoritative websites linking to your website. This is mainly done through citations, press releases, interviews from journalists, and your business being featured in local community media (with links back to your website.)

**Citations** – As mentioned above, citations act as mentions to your business. Each business profile will usually have an area where you can link to your business URL, slightly strengthening your website in the process.

**Reputation Management** – This mainly has to do with checking online reviews and responding to them, but it is also where you respond to customers who mention you on Twitter, public Facebook posts and community groups, and niche forums where your customers are usually active. If you can find people who talk about you online, you can bet that Google is collecting all these mentions about your business as well!

**Social Engagement** – Your Facebook page, Facebook groups, local community groups, Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram and other social networks are all powerful sources for your brand. Being active on some or most of these and communicating with your customers from them shows (and signals to Google) your level of engagement and dedication to client satisfaction.

**Content Syndication** – This is a strategy where you position yourself as an authority in your business niche. For instance, if you are a home inspector, writing a weekly column in a major community newspaper would make you an instance authority figure in your community.

You can have a blog on your website, where you publish articles for your visitors, clients and (most importantly) potential clients to read. Syndicate these articles to your Facebook page, link them to your Twitter feed, and even create an attractive cover graphic and publish on Pinterest and Instagram.

Taking that a step farther, you can also write different how-to articles, blog posts and other pieces of useful content, and have them published on other blogs and media sites as guest posts. Each article will have a link in the About the Author credits back to your website, Facebook page or wherever you wish.

Content is not limited to articles. Videos and audio podcasts are extremely popular as well.

There you have it! A complete strategy to gaining more customers by ranking in local search. By combining some or all of these factors and taking meaningful action, you can build your online presence into a powerful brand to dominate the top of local search. Whenever a nearby customer is looking for a service like yours, you will be there, open for business and ready!