



## Lesson 5: Local SEO

On completion of this lesson you will:

- Be aware of what local SEO is
- Understand how to work out where you are currently listed from a local SEO perspective
- Be aware of where you could get listed online for free, if you are not already
- Understand what local search is and how it works differently to 'normal' search.
- Understand why every business needs a Google My Business Account
- Understand what citations are and how to get them

### Introduction

Let's face it. People are becoming more clever with the way they search on search engines, and if they are looking for a product or service in a set location, they will often tack on a location to their search term. You may even do this yourself.

Whether it's looking for a 'builder in Maroochydore' or a 'restaurant in Cairns', you'll notice that Google will help you find what you're looking for by presenting you with a range of options including those which have 'ads' next to them which are Google Adwords (we cover this in our PPC lesson), those which have red pins next to them which are local SEO options, and then those which fall below this which are traditional SEO options. Google renders results in this way whether you are searching on a desktop or mobile device too.

You've also probably noticed that the red marker listings are quite prominent and lots of people click on them. So this is where local optimisation comes in!

In this lesson we'll show you how local SEO works and encourage you to get your local optimisation working for you so you are featuring in these listings and connecting with more people who are looking for a business, service or product just like yours in your area.

## **But what if I have a home based business/don't want people to know where my business is?**

First things first. Not all businesses are created equal and before you go on with this lesson, you may want to know whether this stuff applies to you.

If this is the case for you, you can rest assured that there are options. In the case of Google My Business, which we will explain in more detail in a moment, rather than displaying your street address on your listing, select the option which says that your business serves customers at their location (if this is the case) or within a set service area.

To set this, when you log into Google+ as the account that owns or manages your business page, you will see a link to "Edit Business Information" under the "Contact Information" card on the "About" Tab.

Click on this link and then click on the pencil icon next to Address.

Check the box next to "I deliver goods and services to my customers at their location" and enter either city, postal codes or a radius in miles or km of your service area.

Deselect the box next to "I also serve customers at my business address" - this will stop your full address from being shown on Google Maps and other products.

For more see: <https://support.google.com/business/answer/3038163>

## **Google My Business**

Given Google has over 80% of the market share in Australia, a good place to start with your local SEO is Google's product called 'Google My Business'.

If you previously used Google Places for Business or Google+ Pages Dashboard to manage your business information, your account has been automatically upgraded to 'Google My Business'. Google My Business makes it easier than ever to update your business information across Google Search, Maps and Google+.

Apart from aiming to get rankings on Google for your website (which we cover in our lessons of SEO – On Page and SEO – Off page), Google My Business gives your business an additional public identity and presence on Google. One of the great things about Google My Business is that all its listings are already optimized for different devices. It will also list your business info on Google Maps. Even if you already have a website, it is an easy way to start expanding your mobile presence.

## **Ineligible businesses**

The following businesses aren't eligible for a local page:

- Businesses that are under construction or that have not yet opened to the public.

- Rental or for-sale properties, such as vacation homes or vacant apartments. Sales or leasing offices, however, are eligible for verification.
- An ongoing service, class, or meeting at a location that you don't own or have the authority to represent. Please coordinate with your host to have your information displayed on the page for their business within their "Introduction" field.

## Ownership

Only business owners or authorised representatives may verify and manage their business information on Google My Business. If you wish to share access to your local page with others such as creative agencies who may be able to help you with this process you can do so by [adding a manager](#).

### **EXERCISE: Getting started with 'Google My Business'**

To get started on Google My Business go to <https://www.google.com.au/business/> then click the "Get on Google" button at the top of the page, and follow the steps to add your business information to Google. Please note that any edits will not appear on Google until you verify your business (more on this below).

Once here, you will be served a map and a search bar. It is a good idea to first search for your business, and see if your business is already on Google My Business, which it may be. If your business could be written in several ways, for instance with and without 'The' or combining or shortening some words, try all possible combinations.

Alternatively search for your business name in [Google MapMaker](#). This can often reveal duplicates. Search MapMaker for your phone number(s), too.

## Getting the structure right

It's important to note the difference between various presences you can have on Google, and to make sure you pick the right structure when you are getting started:

**OPTION 1** - [Google+ profiles](#) are intended to represent you and your friends, not local businesses i.e. Yvette Adams.

**OPTION 2** - [Brand Google+ pages](#) are used by organizations, brands or artist that don't have a physical location or storefront. We don't have one of these, because we have a storefront.

**OPTION 3** - [Local Google+ pages](#) are used by local businesses with a physical storefront (or that serve customers at their location). Only local pages are eligible to appear on Google Maps i.e. The Training Collective, because we have offices on the Sunshine Coast and in Newcastle too.

So it is common for most people to have either Option 1 + Option 2, OR Option 1 + Option 3 UNLESS they are a sole operator, in which case Option 1 may be sufficient.

EXERCISE: Which of the above options will suit you. Indicate it below.

## Got more than one location?

If your business has ten or more locations, you can add them all at once using the bulk upload tool. Read more about bulk uploads here:

[https://support.google.com/business/answer/3217744?hl=en&ref\\_topic=6082678](https://support.google.com/business/answer/3217744?hl=en&ref_topic=6082678)

## Reasons why your listing may not show up

Once you have decided which Option to go for, and created a listing, there can sometimes be issues why your listing isn't showing up. Here are some possible reasons:

### 1. **Your business isn't verified.**

The business information you provide us won't be eligible to appear on Google until you verify your business by following these instructions:

[https://support.google.com/business/answer/2911778?hl=en&ref\\_topic=4854193](https://support.google.com/business/answer/2911778?hl=en&ref_topic=4854193)

### 2. **Your business appears on Google Maps, but doesn't always appear in search results**

Your business information's placement in search results will vary, but in the long run, having correct, comprehensive, and up-to-date business information is the most effective way to ensure the best possible ranking. Learn more about ranking and search results and how Google uses business information.

### 3. **You recently added or edited your business information.**

Google's search results are based on algorithms that take a wide range of factors into account. When you make changes to your business information, it may shift that balance a bit. These changes may take up to 3 days to appear. You should still be able to find your business after making edits by searching for it by name on Google Maps.

### 4. **Your business information doesn't comply with Google's guidelines [Read these at: <https://support.google.com/business/answer/3038177>]**

Following these guidelines helps avoid common problems, including changes to your information, or, in some cases, removal of your business information from Google.

You'll know if you've violated the guidelines if you see a message informing you that your business information has been disabled or suspended when you visit the Google My Business dashboard. Once you're sure your business follows these guidelines, contact Google for help getting your business information live.

## Ranking of local results on Google

Once you have a listing on Google My Business, there are a number of factors which determine where you will rank on a location based search AND it can change.

Google Maps search results are based primarily on relevance, distance, and prominence. These factors are combined to help someone find the best match for any given search.

For example, Google might decide that a business that's farther away from your location is more likely to have what a user is looking for than a business that's closer.

Here's more detail on what relevance, distance, and prominence mean so you can try and align your listings to Google better:

**1. Relevance:** Relevance is how well a local listing matches what someone is searching for. Adding complete and detailed business information can help us better understand your business and match you to relevant search results.

**2. Distance:** Just like it sounds -- how far is each potential search result from the location term used in a search? If you don't specify a location in your search, Google will calculate distance based on what they know about your location.

**3. Prominence:** This describes how well-known or prominent a business can be. This is based on information Google has about a business from across the web (like links, articles, and directories). Some places are more prominent in the offline world, and they try to reflect this online as well. For example, famous museums, landmark hotels, or well-known store brands that are familiar to many people are also likely to be more prominent in search results.

Google Maps and Google My Business are free services, so there's no way to request or pay for a better ranking. In addition, Google does their best to keep the details of the algorithm confidential in order to make the ranking system as fair as possible for everyone.

### **The information displayed on Google+ pages may not come from you!**

Information displayed on Google+ pages comes from a variety of different sources and is meant to provide your customers with the most complete and up-to-date information about your business.

Even if you've verified your business on Google, you may see content, like reviews and photos from your customers and fans, alongside the information you provide. And some of the information about your business that you share with Google when you're creating your page might not appear there.

### **EXERCISE**

Get yourself listed on Google My Business. Aim to make the listing as complete as possible. Submit the link in the field below once you have completed this task. Or share it in the Private Facebook group.

### **Your support options for Google My Business**

Need help with Google My Business? Here's a few places you can turn to if you do, or simply to keep up to date with future developments:

- <https://support.google.com/business> - Main help files
- <http://googleandyourbusiness.blogspot.com/> - Read Google's blog for their latest news.
- **[Follow @GoogleSMB on Twitter](#)** - Tools and tips for small to medium-sized businesses.
- **[Google and Your Business Forum](#)** - Learn from other users
- **[Google+ Your Business](#)** - Learn more about Google+ and your business

## Get reviews on your Google listing!

**At the current time, listings with more reviews tend to rank better in Google.**

To encourage reviews for your business:

- **Remind your customers to [leave feedback on Google](#).** Simply reminding customers that it's quick and easy to leave feedback on Google on mobile or desktop can help your business stand out from sites with fewer reviews.
- **Become an active presence on Google and respond to reviews.** Your customers will notice that your business values their input and respond with more reviews.

**Make sure your business information is [verified](#).** Only verified local Google+ pages can respond to reviews.

More about reviews on Google:

**[https://support.google.com/plus/topic/2624941?hl=en&ref\\_topic=2489960](https://support.google.com/plus/topic/2624941?hl=en&ref_topic=2489960)**

## Other places you should list your business to improve your local optimisation

### 1. YELP

Yelp is very popular in the US and has also gained a lot of momentum in Australia. Yelp is one of the four places you must list your local business because iPhone users who rely on, or turn to Siri (the built in smart machine within your phone of which you can ask directions, restaurant tips and so on) pulls its location related results from Yelp. Hold down the menu button on an iPhone for instance and ask Siri for 'best steak restaurant in Maroochydore'. Siri will pull results from those listed on Yelp. If you're not listed there, you won't come up as a suggestion by Siri.

Listing on Yelp is also free and relatively easy. Simply go to this link and follow the

steps: <https://biz.yelp.com.au/claiming>.

Again, flesh out your listing with photos, categorise, correct address and phone information and add as much information as you can provide. Be consistent in terms of putting similar information on Google+ Local as you do on Yelp, and others.

EXERCISE: List your business on Yelp.

## 2. FOURSQUARE

I first got onto Foursquare in 2010 and found it to be a fun way to 'check in' to places (long before Facebook offered check ins) and be incentivised for doing so. I hoped it would take off in Australia but truth be told, it never really did.

However, ever since Instagram did a deal whereby it pulls location results from Foursquare when you name the location of where you are when you add an image, say a picture of the steak at the restaurant, savvy users will search for your business on Instagram, which is pulling results from Foursquare, to allow you to show that you are at that restaurant and the picture was taken there.

So if your business is not listed on Foursquare, and people have taken an image whilst at your venue and wanted to post it and say where they are, your business will not be among the list of options presented to them.

Read more about Foursquare here: read a previous post I have written about it here and claim or start your listing here: <http://business.foursquare.com/listing/>.

EXERCISE: List your business on Foursquare

## 3. BING PLACES

Whilst Bing is still very much a poor cousin to Google when it comes to location and maps, when people are searching on Facebook, if they don't find what they are looking for in the search bar, because perhaps they spelled the name wrong or they are searching for a service or product, without knowing the name and there is no existing Facebook page for that business, a Bing maps listing will result.

Wouldn't it be cool if your business is there waving its flag encouraging people to know you are there and to come on over?

To list your business on Bing go to: <https://www.bingplaces.com/>.

EXERCISE: List your business on Bing.

## Introducing citations!

Now that you have your local listings up and running, it's time to further boost your local SEO, by getting citations.

Citations are mentions of your business name and location on other sites and they really help with your local search rankings, as well as the overall ranking of your website on search engines.

There are 4 basic types of sites you'll want to get listed on:

1. Generic directories (e.g. [startlocal.com.au](http://startlocal.com.au), [www.hotfrog.com.au/](http://www.hotfrog.com.au/)). Also see this list: <http://www.localvisibilitysystem.com/definitive-local-search-citations/#australia>
2. Industry-specific directories (e.g. [www.naturaltherapypages.com.au/](http://www.naturaltherapypages.com.au/) and [www.homeimprovementpages.com.au](http://www.homeimprovementpages.com.au/)).
3. Region-specific sites (e.g. [mysunshinecoast.com.au](http://mysunshinecoast.com.au)).
4. Sites where you can get an "unstructured" citation, like a mention in a newspaper or by a "local" blogger.

A citation contains the name, address, and phone number of your business as Google views it listed at other websites across the web—professionally known by directories as NAP. Back-links do not normally contain all of your physical location details. A citation does.

You want to be consistent with the way you approach citation building, and in the way you list citations.

Follow this quick three step process called **CHECK, FIX, ADD**.

1. Check to see if the listing is on the location you propose to list – maybe someone has done it prior to you
2. If the listing is there, make sure the NAP is 100% accurate. If not, **fix** it!
3. If the listing does not exist, add it

To help you be consistent with your citations, download this Google Spreadsheet – it's a template for tracking your citations.

Once you have written out your standard spiel (rich with keywords of course) simply copy and paste this into numerous locations, and keep good records on the spreadsheet of where they are, what the username/pass are and if it is verified.

**EXERCISE:** Set yourself a goal of how many citations you want to achieve each week or month. Commit to this, or outsource it if you do not think you will have the time.

## Conclusion

So there it is. Several places that you must list your local business if you want to be found online which are all free, and are all well worth spending a little time on getting right.

I encourage you to go ahead and check if you are already listed with these networks. If not, get listed! If you are already listed, check what the listing features, claim it, and maximise it's potential by ensuring you have a complete and up to date listing.

Never let more than a few months go by without doing an audit of your citations - so you know which ones are OK and which still need fixing. You might be surprised at what you'll find, even after you've put in a ton of work and followed these best practices.

#### REFERENCES:

<http://moz.com/learn/local>

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