

Creating a Solid Online Presence for Local Businesses



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Introduction

Thanks for downloading our guide on *Creating a Solid Online Presence for Local Businesses!*

This guide will take you through the process of what is needed for a strong online presence with a focus on getting local exposure for small and medium businesses.

If you are a new business or a business without an online presence you can follow all the steps in this guide.

If you already have some sort of online presence you can still follow the steps to double-check or improve what you may already have.

Although not required, I encourage you to complete the steps below in order. Some of the steps require information that may have been created from previous steps.

While the process is geared towards strengthening a local businesses local presence it can work to strengthen any business's online presence.



Prerequisites for Local SEO

In order to create a successful local online presence for your business you will first need a few things in place to validate that it is a business to the search engines.

Registered Business Name

Your business needs to be a valid business and registered as such. By creating an LLC or incorporating your business, you will also be automatically added to a database of businesses which Google and other sites use to populate business listings. Later in this guide we will go through the process of securing access to those listings and validating them.

Local Address

A business location is required but residential addresses will work.

Local Phone Number

The phone number should be land line based and not cellular – 800 numbers are fine but will be used as a secondary number.

Be Constant, Be Careful

Be very careful when setting up anything on the web for your local business. The information you use can be very hard to change after it is saved and/or validated.

You will need to make sure the information is accurate and make sure the information used is consistent on all the sites you touch. Look at the following examples:

3456 Second Street is not the same as **3456 2nd Street** and not the same as **3456 2nd St.**

555-123-1234 is not the same as **555.123.1234** and not the same as **(555) 123-1234**

Acme Inc. is not the same as **Acme INC.** and not the same as **Acme, Inc.**

Keeping your business information exactly the same across all the sites, will help the search engines validate your business consistently throughout the internet and make it easier on your Local Search efforts.

Some sites will do things like mask your phone number which will force it into a specific format that may be different from other sites which is okay. Some sites may abbreviate certain address information which is also okay if it cannot be changed. Just be sure to be consistent where you can and make changes where possible to keep the information consistent.



Website

Your Businesses website is the foundation to a strong online presence. Designing a site from scratch is a big undertaking but the tools below will help make it easier.

Domain Name

Choosing a domain name is an important first step to creating an online presence.

Use the following guidelines when picking a domain name:

Easy to remember

Use .com whenever possible

Do not use dashes

Hosting

Who you choose to host your website is an important choice and most people go one of two ways, based on price or performance.

Price is usually the deciding factor but keep in mind that you usually get what you pay for. Cheaper hosting providers tend to be slower by lumping you in on overburdened shared hosting. The more expensive providers tend to be faster and offer more security features to protect your site.

Keep in mind that Google is taking site speed into account when ranking sites and providing search results. Their rationale is that a faster site gives a better user experience and as a result has more value to the searcher. A faster site can give you a boost in the search results.

Our hosting sits somewhere in the middle with the lower cost of shared servers with the security and performance of the expensive providers.

Some options are below:

Value Hosting Providers:

Godaddy.com

Hostgator.com



Our Hosting

We can get you site started off right by preloading WordPress and all our recommended plugins for you.

<http://www.expertbusinesssearch.com/>

Performance Hosting Providers

If price is not an option we have found the best performance through WPEngine. It may cost more than others but their performance and security is worth the price.

<http://wpengine.com/>

Creating your website

Creating your own website has never been easier. There are a ton of tools out there to help you create a website, here are a few we use and recommend.

We recommend using a Content Management System or CMS because of their ease of use.

WordPress

WordPress has been around since 2003 and is a type of CMS that allows users to easily create sites that have a consistent look and feel without having to be web programmers or designers.

WordPress is based on PHP and MySQL and once installed can be customized with Plugins and Themes.

Plugins add functionality to a WordPress site and there are tons of them. If you can think it up, typically there is a plugin for it. Examples of common plugins are for SEO (see our Local Search Plugin), contact pages with spam protection and image slides.

Themes are for the overall look and feel of your site. Themes can also have features built on the WordPress database which make it easier to do things like add buttons, media or other design elements without the need for other plugins or programming.

A WordPress site can also be custom programmed to get it to do things that it would normally not do or that there is not a plugin already designed for. Site design can also be tweaked to fine tune design elements and or placement. Typically sites can be completed without having any custom programming done.



Keyword Research

The traffic your site receives is dependent largely on the keywords you target and the page structure of your site.

Finding the correct keywords and local modifiers can be a large undertaking but the results you get make it worth the effort.

Site Structure

When structuring your site, the way you organize the pages has a huge impact on the results.

I recommend a using a type of silo structure. Basically what that means is that your most important keywords will be the main or top pages on your site. The pages below each main keyword should be related to and variations or alternates of the keyword they are under. Each page below the main keyword page will link to the top keyword page giving it more SEO value and reinforce relevancy with variations.

The top keyword page should have the most content with 750 or more words. Each linking page should have 500 or more words and only link to the top keyword page.

When making pages, be sure to put your keywords in the Title and page name. Separate words in the page name by a dash and never an underscore. Google uses the underscore to connect words where it uses the dash to separate words.

The content on all the pages should be unique and should never be copied or spun from other sites. The quality of your content is a huge ranking factor for your site.



Themes and Theme Creation

The overall look and feel of your WordPress site is determined by the theme. There are plenty of free themes available but typically the paid themes look and function better. A few of our favorite theme resources are below.

Artisteer

Artisteer, unlike the other theme options below, lets you create a theme for use on WordPress. This is a good choice if you will be creating multiple themes or would like to have greater flexibility with the look of the theme.

www.artisteer.com

Elegant Themes

Elegant Themes is a good choice for great looking themes but may require some minor coding to get them to do exactly what you want.

<http://www.elegantthemes.com>

Enfold

The Enfold Theme is our new favorite theme. It has a great look and editor and is easy to create a great looking site. Almost all of our new sites are being designed with this theme.

[The Enfold Theme on Themeforest can be found here.](#)



Must Have WordPress Plugins

Plugins add features and functionality to WordPress easily. Below is a list of plugins that we use on our sites.

Local Search and Local SEO

Even if your site is not for a local business I still recommend our Local Search Plugin. It will give you a contact page that formats your sites contact information in a way that Google and other search engines want to see, making it easier to get indexed.

The Free Version can be found here:

<http://wordpress.org/plugins/local-search-seo-contact-page/>

The paid version which adds the following can be found here:

- * **Multiple location support.** Keep separate sets of data for each location you have, and output any location's data on any page or post using shortcodes.
- * **We now have widgets!** The "Contact Info" widget will now be available for placement in your site layout. Use as many widgets linked to as many different locations as you desire.
- * **Import / Export:** You can now backup and restore your location data, seamlessly integrated into WordPress.

<http://www.expertbusinesssearch.com/store/premium-local-search-seo-contact-page/>

SEO

SEO by Yoast

<http://wordpress.org/plugins/wordpress-seo/>

Contact Forms and CAPTCHA

Contact Form 7

<http://wordpress.org/plugins/contact-form-7/>

Contact Form DB

<http://wordpress.org/plugins/contact-form-7-to-database-extension/>

Really Simple CAPTCHA for Contact Form 7

<http://wordpress.org/plugins/really-simple-captcha/>

Analytics

Google Analyticator

<http://wordpress.org/plugins/google-analyticator/>

Backup

BackUpWordPress

<http://wordpress.org/plugins/backupwordpress/>



Social Media and Other Must Haves

The balance of the sites below are needed to round out your online presence. “Google My Business” is the first account you should gain access to and fill. It will give you a ton of exposure.

Social Media activity is a “must do” for the new internet landscape. Creating an account and being actively social on these sites can have a huge impact on your exposure online.

Google My Business

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

<http://www.google.com/+/brands/>

YouTube

An account on YouTube will allow you to host videos on YouTube for our website and also create another source of traffic for your business.

YouTube.com

Facebook

Facebook is another must have for local businesses. Make sure to setup a business page and interact with your followers.

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

Twitter

Similar to Facebook, a twitter account for your business is a must have.

<https://business.twitter.com/>



What's Next

Reverse Engineering Your Competition

Raking higher on the search engines requires you to have your information in place the right way and in the right places. If you worked through the guide and are looking for what to do next you should analyze your competition to see what they are doing. Even if you rank higher than your competition you should still take a look at what they are doing.

I recommend typing your search terms into Google and other search engines to find other businesses that do the same type of thing your business does. From there, create a list of those businesses and type their name into search engines to see where they come up and make a list. Also use their phone number and address to see what other results show up and compile a list of sites.

The sites that come up are usually directories or trade sites that can be joined. Sometimes they are sites that you can sometimes register with for free; sometimes there may be a fee. By compiling a list of sites from various competitors you can see which ones are common to more than one and start there.

Finding the sites they are listed on and getting listed on those same sites will allow you to have the same links validating your business. By combining the list from all your competitors you should be able to be listed in more places than any one competitor giving your business an advantage. The idea is to give the search engines as much validating information that is relevant to your business as possible.

Be Patient

Search results can take time to update. We do sometimes see results in a few hours but usually it take a few days or even weeks.

If you do not get the results you need right away, don't stop, continue to do blog posts that are relevant to your business and make sure to share them to social media. Continued exposure through social media while adding valuable, relevant blog content to your site can only help you in the process to creating a strong online presence for your local business.

Run Faster Than the Next Guy...

To get better results you need to be better than the results around you. If you are not doing as well as you think you should be doing and you have given it time to index, sometimes 30 or more days, keep at it. Adding fresh content to your website and being active in social media will give you long term results.

