



Google+ Local Business Guide



Setting up and optimizing your Google+ Local page is one of the best ways to steer high-quality local search engine traffic right to your door. Here's why: Every single day, people and companies search Google for nearby vendors to do business with. So the question is, does your business show up? And if so, how well does your listing reflect your business and serve your goals?

In this free report you will find some helpful tips for using Google+ Local to reach your customers at the BEST POSSIBLE moment: when they're looking for the products and services you sell.

Let's get started!



Who cares?

Before we get off to the races, let's start off by answering “the why”—i.e., Why should your business bother using Google+ Local at all? Small and mid-sized businesses typically have few extra resources, so they are very protective over them. What's more, people have become cynical (justifiably) about over-hyped, fly-by-night marketing gimmicks.

For that reason, I want to take a moment to explain why I think it's worthwhile for your business to set up a Google+ Local page, and further, why Google+ is a platform that will deliver sustainable results for your organization.

The answer to the “why” question is pretty straightforward. There are several statistics that matter here ...

- 97 percent of consumers search for local businesses online
- With 65.9 percent market share, the clear majority of these local searches are done using Google, which is still the undisputed king of web search (Bing has 15.1 percent market share)
- 72 percent of consumers research companies through social channels before making purchases
- 71 percent claim reviews from family members or friends exert a “great deal” or “fair amount” of influence on their purchase decisions

Moreover, Google has clearly decided to place a lot of value on local listings in their search results. What's more, as Google pushes into mobile, the company will feature local listings through their mobile apps for Android (currently available) and iPhone (in the works), helping nearby customers discover your business.

So, if you take all of these things together, it's easy to see that Google+ Local is an incredible opportunity to get in front of your target market, right at the moment they're looking for what you sell. And we don't expect this to change in the foreseeable future.

Benefits? Check.

We'd be remiss if we didn't take a moment to list the basic business benefits of using Google+ Local. Here's a quick list—it's not exhaustive by any means, but it's a good start:

Pay nothing (it's free)

It won't cost you a penny to list your business on Google. (That said, it will take you some time to set up your page.)

Get found on Google, increase website/store traffic

This is probably the most compelling benefit. In the digital age, Google is virtually everyone's first stop when looking for any kind of information—including local vendors. By increasing your visibility in search, you open your business to an *enormous* and constantly growing audience of people who need and want what YOU sell.

Get found on mobile devices (!!!)

Most local businesses struggle to maintain a web presence at all, let alone a “responsive” web presence that is fully optimized for mobile devices like smartphones and tablets. The fact is, the web is becoming increasingly mobile. Morgan Stanley predicts that mobile web browsing will outpace desktop browsing within just a few years.

Businesses ignore this trend at their own peril!

By optimizing your Google+ Local page, your business can effectively outsource its mobile marketing to Google, which offers consumers several mobile apps that facilitate local business discovery. These mobile apps help buyers find you!

Help your business stand out amongst the competition

Get this: according to a recent count, only 20 percent of eligible small businesses have claimed their listing on Google+ Local! By claiming your listing you greatly increase your ability to stand out in your industry or niche. Why leave this low-hanging fruit for your competitors to snatch up?

Learn more about your customers

It's no shocker: Google, a company founded and run by coders, is all about analytics. And thus, their business tools, Google+ Local included, come with excellent tools for mining data and gathering market intelligence you can use to improve your offering, keep customers happy, and collect bigger profits.

Boost engagement with images and updates

In the past 10 years, the web has gotten social. Google is no exception. They've made it easier for businesses to engage with their customers and build relationships. And here's the thing: your customers *expect* you to be active on social networks like Google+. Think I'm just making that up? On the contrary: according to a Cone Business Study:

- 93 percent of customers expect companies to have a presence on social channels
- 85 percent expect companies to interact with them on those social channels

Pocket bigger profits than the competition

As you can see, Google+ Local is a free resource that helps you get found online, drive more traffic to your website, stand out in a crowded marketplace, acquire insight into your customer base, engage with your customers using a variety of media types, increase sales with promos and special offers, and ultimately, boost your overall profitability.

But what is Google+ Local exactly?

Before we go too much further, let's take a moment to make sure we're all on the same page in terms of what precisely Google+ Local is. This tool is pretty new, after all.

A replacement-in-progress for Google Places, Google+ Local is a tool that allows business owners to update and manage their physical business location information and connect with local customers. Google+ Local is integrated with all of Google's key products—desktop and mobile apps included.

Let's look at some of the basic functions of this tool, for users and for businesses

With Google+ Local, users can:

- Get place recommendations based on their "circles," their past reviews, and their location
- Publish reviews and photos of their favorite places
- Read Zagat summaries of user reviews for a place
- View the local Google+ page for a business to see reviews, photos, and other information
- Find reviews from people they know and trust highlighted in their search results

With Google+ Local, businesses like yours can:

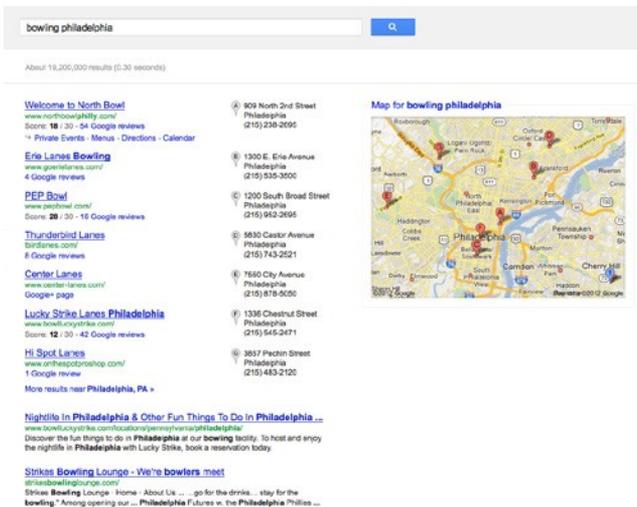
- Get found on Google free of charge and help your business stand out
- Add photos, update physical address and hours, or promote your business with ads
- Connect with customers: Google+ Local lets you see what people are saying, and respond to customer reviews
- Interact with customers directly and build a following (a la Facebook): Start real face-to-face conversations, post messages to your circles
- Share: videos, customer photos, product updates, promotion info, testimonials, case studies—anything and everything!

How do users find my page?

All of this may seem pretty abstract. So let's run through some scenarios in which a consumer lands on a Google+ Local page. There are several different avenues that might lead a buyer to your listing. The first and most familiar is through a basic Google search from a laptop or desktop computer.

Google search

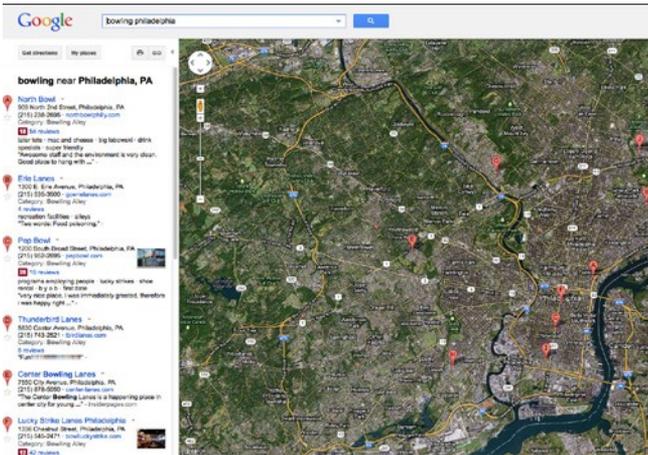
After entering a search term (e.g. "bowling Philadelphia"), the user is presented with a search engine results page—aka a "SERP"—with a variety of listings: local, sponsored, and organic. If you click through to the map or click any of the reviews associated with the local listings, you'll be directed to that business's Google+ Local page.



A Google search engine results page (SERP) for the term "bowling philadelphia."

Google Maps search

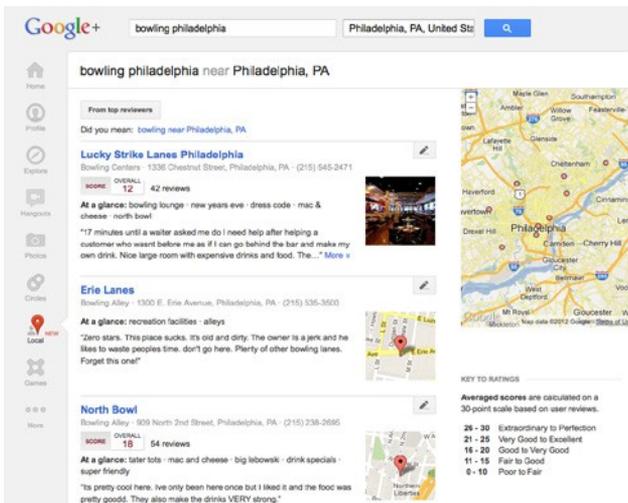
A lot of local buyers have become quite savvy about searching for local companies, and they'll go straight to maps.google.com to find nearby vendors, bypassing google.com and saving a step.



A Google Maps SERP for the term "bowling philadelphia."

Google+ Local search

Similarly, if you're logged into your Google+ profile, you can navigate to the Local tab and perform a search there.



A Google+ Local SERP for the term "bowling philadelphia."

Mobile browser search



A mobile browser SERP for the term “bowling philadelphia.”

Mobile app search

Several Google apps for both Android and iPhone will display Google+ Local listings.

Google+ Local page Now

let's take a closer look at a Local listing... Here's a

Google+ Local page as viewed on a PC:

North Bowl

909 North 2nd Street Philadelphia, PA 19123 Follow

Posts **About** Photos Videos Write a review

Introduction Opened in July 2006, North Bowl is the ultimate hang-out Oron dreamed. The completely renovated former mechanics garage is now a 21,000-square-foot nightlife haven. From the retro benches from bowling alleys of the 50s to the sculptural bar and glass enclosed pod that overlooks the lanes from the lounge, North Bowl is a place that is truly unique to Philadelphia. Its not just about bowling, it's about the atmosphere and the overall experience.

909 North 2nd Street Philadelphia, PA 19123
(215) 238-2695 · northbowlphilly.com

Bowling Alley, Pizza Restaurant · Today 5:00 pm – 2:00 am · [Menu](#)

SCORE OVERALL **18** 54 reviews Scoring guide

At a glance: tater tots · mac and cheese · big lebowski · drink specials · super friendly

30 Reviews from everyone and 24 scores without reviews Most helpful

Brittany Decker reviewed 3 months ago
Overall 1 / 3
Its pretty cool here. Ive only been here once but I liked it and the food was pretty goood. They also make the drinks VERY strong.

Helpful? Yes No

www.northbowlphilly.com/

2nd St & Poplar St (123 ft SW)

Directions

+1 **+207**

Edit business details

STREET VIEW

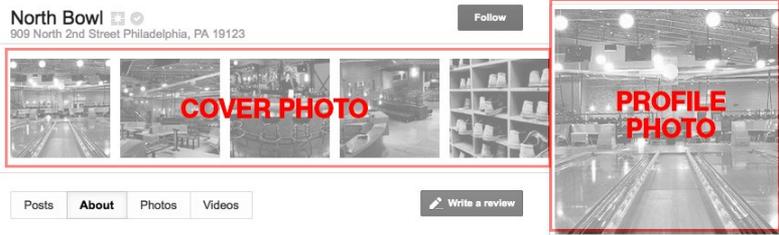
45 IN THEIR CIRCLES

Jordan Hodgson Add

Right below the cover photo you can find out all the basic information about a business, from the address and phone number, to how to get there by public transportation, and even the price of a restaurant's average entree. If you're a business owner, you can update and edit this information in your Google+ Local account (or Google Places account for those of you with existing accounts).

Imagery

Google+ Local (and Google+ in general) provides a GREAT opportunity to showcase your business, your products, your staff—whatever you want to show the world. The Local layout puts a lot emphasis on visuals, so as a business owner, it's imperative that you use this real estate to its full potential! make sure that every image you upload to Google+ is supporting your story and putting your brand in the best possible light.



As you can see, imagery is front and center on Google+ Local.

Cover photo

Dimensions: 900px x 180px panoramic OR five 110px x 110px square tiles

Profile photo

Dimensions: 250px x 250px

Shared albums

Upload images of your product line, your business, and your staff, as well as photos from special events and user-submitted photos

Key business info

Your Local page is a listing—so it contains the basic information your customers need, i.e. what it is that you offer and how to get in touch.



Address

Contact information

Store/business hours

“At a glance” information

About Statement (Introduction)

Introduction Opened in July 2006, North Bowl is the ultimate hang-out Orton dreamed. The completely renovated former mechanics garage is now a 21,000-square-foot nightlife haven. From the retro benches from bowling alleys of the 50s to the sculptural bar and glass enclosed pod that overlooks the lanes from the lounge, North Bowl is a place that is truly unique to Philadelphia. Its not just about bowling, it's about the atmosphere and the overall experience.

Your page's 'About' section, i.e. your Introduction statement, is incredibly important in terms of profiling your business and giving people a quick snapshot of what you're all about, how you're different from your competitors, and why people should spend their money with you.

Tabs

A typical Google+ Local page has four tabs, with the Posts tab set as the default.

- Posts
- About
- Photos
- Videos

Customer reviews & Zagat rating

Google has totally revamped its scoring system. Gone are the 4-5 star ratings. Now it's Zagat's 30-point scale. According to Google, this "expressive" rating system makes it easier for users to better share their view about what makes a place unique. Your customers will be able to rate your business on multiple criteria on a 1-3 scale.

Averaged scores are calculated on a 30-point scale based on user reviews.

26 - 30 Extraordinary to Perfection

21 - 25 Very Good to Excellent

16 - 20 Good to Very Good

11 - 15 Fair to Good

0 - 10 Poor to Fair

Scores with multiple "aspects"

These scores will show you several scores for different criteria. For example, restaurants are scored across three areas—food, decor, and service—with food being the primary aspect.



Overall scores

When Google doesn't have enough user ratings on different aspects, it will just show an overall score. An overall score is comparable to a score in the primary aspect for a location, like food for restaurants.

Why do customer reviews matter?

It's pretty simple. Users put a TON of trust in their social networks: 90 percent trust online recommendations from people they know. But get this: 70 percent trust opinions of unknown users they have never met...

In other words, Google+ Local gives your business an incredible opportunity to harness the power of social proof—a psychological phenomenon where people assume the actions of others reflect “correct” behavior. That's a high-flown way of saying that we're pack animals—we follow the herd. Google+ Local will help your business fully capitalize on our innate desire to fit in and belong.

70 percent of consumers trust opinions of unknown users

they have never met...

The flip side...

Of course, the flip side is that bad reviews can damage your reputation and hang like an albatross around your neck ... and while that is an unpleasant thought, I want to stress one important fact: opting out of things like social media in order to protect your reputation isn't an option. People will talk about your business regardless of whether you have a page or not! (What's more, anyone can set up a Google+ Local page for your business.) By maintaining an active presence on various networks, you have the opportunity to shape the conversation, respond to reviews, learn from your customers, and improve your business.

Best practices: How to optimize your listing

OK, now it's time to get into the fun stuff: How to make the most of your new platform in Google—how to create a local listing that delivers the biggest return for your business.

By taking the time to optimize your listing, you'll raise the profile of your page and get more prospects to click through, visit your business, and ultimately, purchase your products/services.

Here are a handful of simple ways you can improve your page and make sure it performs at a high level for your business.

Pay close attention to your cover and profile photos

Given that Google has decided to put such a high emphasis on imagery in the Google+ Local layout, it's not surprising that one of the best ways to boost your page's power is to include high-quality images that resonate with your audience. So again, the imperative here is to go beyond the bare minimum. Don't just upload any random old photos you find on your hard drive. Take your time to find great images that reflect the quality of your business, the quality of your team, and the quality of your offering. If you need to hire a local photographer, go for it! (Put an ad in Craigslist—you'll get a ton of responses, particularly if you live near an art school.)

Parting tip: If you're going to use your company logo as your profile pic (recommended), make sure it's high enough resolution and the correct size and shape (at least 250px x 250px square) so that it's not grainy or distorted.

Write a killer Introduction

Your introduction, which appears on your About tab, is your opportunity to speak directly to your audience, without any filters. So don't make this an afterthought!

Here's a great example of a descriptive and compelling statement from a bowling alley in Philadelphia called North Bowl:

Opened in July 2006, North Bowl is the ultimate hang-out Oron dreamed. The completely renovated former mechanics garage is now a 21,000-square-foot nightlife haven. From the retro benches from bowling alleys of the 50s to the sculptural bar and glass enclosed pod that overlooks the lanes from the lounge, North Bowl is a place that is truly unique to Philadelphia. Its not just about bowling, it's about the atmosphere and the overall experience.

Make sure your page is 100 percent complete

So I'll start with the simplest and most important thing you can do to optimize your Google+ Local page ...

Fill it out.

Seriously. That's it. Complete ALL text fields—even the ones that aren't required, particularly: email address, website URL, description, and categories.

Here's a helpful quote from SEOMoz, who know what they're talking about when it comes to Google:

“Think about it like being back in in school and writing a paper; you'll pass doing the minimum set forth but a little extra effort can go a long way. Don't fill out some of the extra details, fill them all out; and don't just add one photo, add several photos.”
– SEOMoz

The larger point is, don't just do the bare minimum. Make sure it's 100 percent complete. In the optimization game, a listing that's 90 percent complete isn't an A-. It's an F!

North Bowl 909 North 2nd Street Philadelphia, PA 19123 [Follow](#)

Posts **About** Photos Videos [Write a review](#)

Introduction Opened in July 2006, North Bowl is the ultimate hang-out Oron dreamed. The completely renovated former mechanics garage is now a 21,000-square-foot nightlife haven. From the retro benches from bowling alleys of the 50s to the sculptural bar and glass enclosed pod that overlooks the lanes from the lounge, North Bowl is a place that is truly unique to Philadelphia. Its not just about bowling, it's about the atmosphere and the overall experience.

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SCORE OVERALL **1.0** 54 reviews [Scoring guide](#)

At a glance: tater tots · mac and cheese · big lebowski · drink specials · super friendly

30 Reviews from everyone and 24 scores without reviews [Most helpful](#)

Brittany Decker reviewed 3 months ago
Overall 1 / 3
Its pretty cool here. Ive only been here once but I liked it and the food was pretty goodd. They also make the drinks VERY strong.

Helpful? Yes No

45 IN THEIR CIRCLES
[Jordan Hodgson](#) [Add](#)

www.northbowlphilly.com/
2nd St & Poplar St (123 ft SW)
Directions
+1 +207

STREET VIEW

Acquire citations from other directories

For those of you toughing it out in crowded markets, the next best thing you can do to improve the visibility of your listing, vis a vis your competitors, is to acquire citations from other business directories. What's a citation? It's a listing of your business on another local directory.

Here's the deal: Google crawls the web for information—citations—about your business from a variety of third-party sources, including Yelp and Yellow Pages. The more citations, or mentions, you have, the more content Google's spiders have to work with, and the more authority your Google+ Local listing will have. The more authority and credibility that your business has in the eyes of Google, the more likely your listing is to appear on the top of the results.

Additionally, it is important to make sure that the information you submit to other directories is consistent. Accuracy across all, or almost all, citation sources helps associate trust with a Google+ Local page.

Here's a list of directories you can get citations from, starting with some of the bigger ones.

- Yelp
- Bing
- Yahoo
- BizJournals
- CitySearch
- Best of the Web
- Mapquest
- Merchant Circle
- Whitepages
- Supermedia
- LinkedIn
- Foursquare
- Biznik
- Local.com
- ThinkLocal
- CitySlick
- MyCity
- Outside.in
- Dex

Encourage customers to write reviews



A Google User reviewed a month ago

Overall 3 / 3

I had a great time at North Bowl. Me and my boyfriend went here on a Friday night and surprisingly there was no wait for a lane. The atmosphere was fun with good music and good lighting and the staff was friendly and quick to help with any problems with the lane. The food did come out a little slow, but the tots were delicious and crispy and the mac n cheese was also very good. Decent selection of beer also helps. Overall I had a great time even though Fridays are more expensive for bowling. I will be going there again sometime!

Here's a more challenging but very effective way to boost the position of your page: get your customers to write reviews.

That means getting in the habit of asking your customers, particularly when they offer unsolicited positive feedback, to take a few moments to put their experience into words and submit it to Google for the world to see.

Another approach is to give people a gift or enter them into a drawing in exchange for their time to submit a review. If you take this route, the important thing to stress is that you're not asking them for a positive review—because that would be a bribe of sorts. Emphasize that you want them to be honest in their assessment of your company, and that they'll get rewarded for their honesty! More often than not, people will be happy to write a review. A few, though, will balk because they're not sure what to say. When this happens, just give them a few prompts, but take care not to put words in their mouth, because their review might come across as a scripted and insincere, which, needless to say, defeats the purpose.

Lastly, do not under any circumstances write bogus reviews and submit them under a pseudonym.

In summary:

- Ask, ask, ask
- Offer incentives, not bribes
- Provide some prompts and/or examples
- Don't write them yourself

Example (you can use) of how to ask a customer for a Google+ Local review:

Part 1/1

Subject: Quick question for you

Hi {firstname},

Quick question for you. Are you happy with your experience with our company?

If so, would you consider writing a brief review for our Google+ Local page? This will help other people find our company online. (If you're not 100% pleased with our service, please let us know so we can make things right!)

How to write a review–

1. Click here to visit our Google+ Local page (INSERT LINK)
2. Click 'Write a review' (blue button). Note: You'll need to sign in to Google+
3. Write a review and click Publish

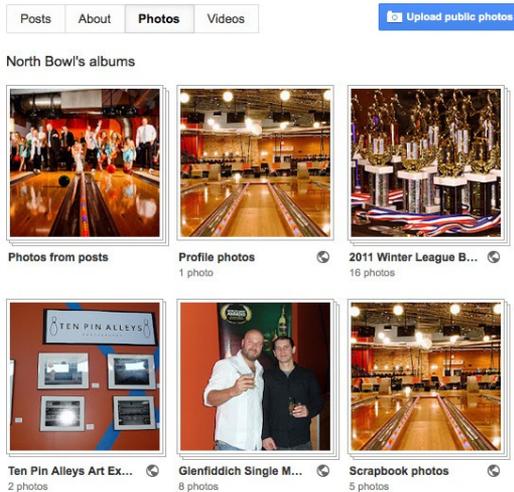
Thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate your candid feedback.

{signature}

Upload a ton of images to your page

The other thing you can and should do is add images. Lots of them. SEO analysts have documented a strong correlation between a page's ranking and the number of photos and videos it has. So make sure to max out your allowed number of images!

- Depending on your market, high quality photos can go a long way
- Consider hiring a local photographer to snap a couple dozen photos



The screenshot shows a Google+ profile page for 'North Bowl's'. At the top, there are navigation tabs for 'Posts', 'About', 'Photos', and 'Videos', with 'Photos' selected. To the right is a blue button labeled 'Upload public photos'. Below the navigation is the text 'North Bowl's albums'. There are six photo album thumbnails arranged in two rows of three. Each thumbnail shows a different aspect of a bowling alley, such as bowling lanes, trophies, and people. Below each thumbnail is a caption and a photo count.

Album Name	Photo Count
Photos from posts	1 photo
Profile photos	1 photo
2011 Winter League B...	16 photos
Ten Pin Alleys Art Ex...	2 photos
Glenfiddich Single M...	8 photos
Scrapbook photos	5 photos

Create offers

Another way to leverage our listing is to include offers. This is a pretty great feature, because it's a surefire way to translate online visits into in-store purchases.

Le Grand Bistro & Oyster Bar | Denver
\$25 for \$50 toward French cuisine & drinks

BUY NOW | \$25 50% off

- Comfort French cuisine
- Classic yet inventive plates
- 125-year-old dining room
- Located downtown in theatre district
- Featured in 5280 Magazine's Best New Restaurants 2012

Offer Details

Discount: **50%**

Time left to buy: **4 days 12:42:01**

Redeem: **Jun 10, 2012 - Dec 6, 2012**

+2 Recommend this on Google



Where to redeem



A few tips:

- Make sure they comply with Google's offer guidelines
- Be **GENEROUS**
- Always identify the value the customer is getting

What not to do

OK, now I want to identify some hazards and pitfalls that you should avoid when using Google+ Local ...

Don't leave gaps in your page

I may sound like a broken record here, but it's worth mentioning again. Don't leave gaps in your page. Fill it out completely!

Google itself has revealed that page completeness is one of the most important ranking factors, so it's vitally important to dot every "I" and cross every "T" when you're setting up your listing.

To reiterate:

- Fill out all text fields, even the ones that aren't required
- Don't just do the bare minimum
- Page completeness is the MOST important ranking factor

Don't "set it and forget it"

This shouldn't come as a surprise: a fresh, regularly updated page will outperform a stale and neglected page. If you want your Google+ Local page to really deliver value to your business, you need to add some value to it on a regular basis. Consider creating a recurring calendar event to remind yourself to log into Google and freshen up your page. This will also give you an opportunity to view your analytics and see how your page is performing.

- Keep your page fresh and accurate
- Monitor customer reviews (use testimonials, respond to critical reviews, etc.)

Don't stuff your name, description, and/or categories with keywords

Unfortunately, many business have received some really bad advice when it comes to Google+ Local optimization. One of the worst pieces of advice is to stuff your page with keywords.

This is dumb for two reasons. First, it tempts the wrath of the Google gods, who consider this a form of spamming. Second, it just makes you look cheesy to your would-be customers.

By all means, use keywords, but don't overdo it.

- Do not tempt the Google gods
- Keyword stuffing looks spammy (which makes your business look bad to customers)

How to get started

So, if you haven't done so already, your first action item is to create your Google+ Local page. However:

- If you already have a Google Places page, you can use that dashboard to control your new Google+ Local page.
- If there is already a Google+ Local page associated with your business, navigate to that page and click the "Manage this page" button (pictured). Follow the steps to verify your connection with the business and become page owner. Verification: request PIN, wait for the postcard or phone call.

If neither of these apply to you, follow these steps to create your Google+ Local page:

- Sign in to Google+ (yes, you must have a Google+ profile to create a Google+ Local page)
- Click
- Click the Create a new page button in the upper right.
- Select the Local Business or Place category.
- Type in your business's phone number and click Locate. Make sure that the phone number you use is a business line and not a personal or cell phone number.
- If you see your business listed, click on your business's name. You'll be able to edit the address later if anything is incorrect. If the name of your business doesn't appear, click Add your business to Google or Look up a different number to try again.
- Enter or edit basic information about your business, including business name, phone number, and address. If Google already has information about your business, you'll be asked to confirm it. You can also edit any information that's incorrect.
- Add categories to your local page to help users better understand what your business does. In the Category box, select the main category that best describes your business.
- Select an age requirement that's appropriate for your business.
- Click Create, and you're done! Now you can visit your page and add even more details about your business, like hours, your website, and more contact information. Learn more.

Frequently asked questions



Let's now address some of the frequently asked questions that business have regarding Google+ Local. Note: If you don't see yours here, don't hesitate to ask me directly.

Does this mean I have to get more involved in Google+?

Yes. If you don't already have a Google Places page, you'll need a Google+ profile in order to create a page in Google+ Local.

I thought Google+ was a bust ... why should I invest in it?

As a distinct social network, yes, Google+ has received mixed reviews from social media watchers, and it certainly hasn't dented Facebook's armor. But as Google continues to roll up its various products into one seamless entity, Google+'s popularity as a distinct social network matters less and less ... More to the point: going forward, if you want to have a presence on Google at all—namely in search—you're wise to embrace Google+.

I want someone else to manage my page, but I don't want to give them my personal Google+ login info ... what can I do?

Add a manager to your page. There are two types of admins in Google+ page world: owners and managers. Each page can only have one owner, but can have up to 50 managers. All managers have the same rights—managers don't possess different "ranks." Adding managers allows you to share control of your page with multiple people without having to share your personal login information. Also: The names of the owner and managers aren't visible to the public or to those in the page's circles.

How can I make the most of my local listing on Google+?

We've already covered the basics, but I'll review them anyway, because repetition is the mother of learning and the father of excellence!

- Make sure your listing is complete. More than that, make sure you've taken every opportunity to go above and beyond the bare minimum.
- Add a bunch of photos and take time to write a compelling company description.
- Create listings in other directories, making sure to include the exact same information in each one.
- Encourage your happy customers to write positive reviews.

What if I get a bad review? Can I take it down?

The bad news is, you can't take it down unless it violates Google's terms of use, and that's a very tough case to make. It's going to require a really egregious situation to convince Google to remove a review. They will look for any reason to leave the comment in place. That's not because they're heartless and don't care about your reputation, but because they need to maintain their own reputation as a fair and neutral party.

But you can always attempt to diffuse bad reviews by responding publicly. In some cases, this can end up being a PR victory for your business, because it shows the public that you take customer complaints seriously and are committed to excellent service.

Why is there already a listing for my business?

It's pretty simple: Google spiders can crawl the web and assemble a page automatically, using the information they find from other domains. Additionally, new listings can be created by ... anyone! Which brings us to the last question ...

Why do I need to claim my listing?

Claiming your listing has several benefits. The first and most important is that it "locks" your listing to everyone else. You now own it and the majority of its contents. (Excluding the customer reviews, of course.)

Another benefit is that claiming your listing provides information on who is viewing it. You can see how many times your listing has shown up in searches, how many people viewed it, even how many people asked for directions!

Can I hire someone to submit positive reviews to Google+ Local?

No. Well, you can, but it's a bad idea. This practice—widely considered a form of spamming—violates the terms of most web directories, Google included. Even if the reviews are legitimate—maybe they came from surveys or comment cards or something—even then, you're not supposed to submit them on behalf of the original author, according to Google policy. And if you get caught, Google can pull your listing. In short, it's not worth it, let alone ethical, to submit fake reviews.

What if I don't have a store or office? Can I still create a listing?

Yes, you certainly can, but you still need to submit a mailing address to Google to create your listing. If you work from home or you are a mobile business you can specify a "service area" in the signup process and opt to hide your address.

Does Google+ Local replace Google Places?

Some of you may already have a Google Places page and you might be wondering if it's true that Google+ Local is replacing Google Places. The answer is ... yes and no.

The user-facing part of Google Places is going away, but the backend admin panel that businesses use to manage their existing Google Places pages is staying (for the time being); it will be the dashboard for the new Google+ Local pages until Google gets around to folding it into Google+. For businesses that don't have a Google Places page, Google+ Local is a total replacement.

Current Google Places user?

Get updates from Google when changes are made to Google Places:
http://support.google.com/places/bin/request.py?contact_type=verification_address_collection&

What's different about Google+ Local (compared to Google Places)?

Perhaps the biggest difference is cosmetic. Imagery plays a much bigger role in the new local pages. Google: “[By] streamlining the layout and putting more focus on photos and reviews, we hope to help you highlight what makes your business truly unique.”

Social search integration

Now, if your customers are on Google+ and they search for local businesses using Search, Maps, they may see reviews of your businesses from people they know from their circles (such reviews are displayed prominently next to your business name).

Customer interaction

With Google+ Local, merchants can develop followers and message them, and have the kinds of social interactions now available on Facebook and Twitter. They can also group their followers into circles (e.g. current customers, prospects, customers of the month, etc.).



Search engine optimization

There's a ton of SEO potential here. Most notably, unlike Google Places pages, these new Google+ Local pages will be indexed.

Higher barriers to post reviews

Users need a verified Google+ account (verified with a phone call or text) to write a review, and that review will be associated with their Google+ identity and made public.



There will be challenges, but we can help you!

So, at this point, you might be feeling overwhelmed. And to perfectly honest, they will be some challenges in this process, and some ongoing effort will be necessary to really be successful.

But don't be discouraged by these challenges. Because ...

Remember the benefits. Google+ Local is a great tool to have in your marketing arsenal. It's a form of advertising that's affordable, effective and relevant. Further, recall that 97 percent of consumers use search engines to find local companies, with the two-thirds using Google to do so.

And you can do it!

Google+ Local is not rocket science. Not by any stretch of the imagination.

So don't worry. You have everything you need to be successful, and if you need help or encouragement along the way, you can always call on me or a member of my team to help you get unstuck.

I hope this guide has been helpful. Please take what you've learned in these pages and apply one thing today, one thing tomorrow ... and don't stop until your business is taking off like a rocket! I guarantee you, it will be worth your time.

– Dustin K.

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