

# FOCUS ON IT / TECHNOLOGY

## Local SEO - What Local Businesses Need to Focus on 2018 and Beyond?

### **2018 is the year to raise your local SEO game to another level!**



By Randy Rowe; Hureka Technologies, Inc.

If you're a local business that wants to get noticed in search engines and generate more customers, you need a local SEO plan in place.

Back in the 1990s, SEO was rather simple and there wasn't much difference between SEO and local SEO. However, today, there are certain factors that specifically and exclusively affect local SEO. You need to know that certain local SEO strategies specifically help you optimize your business for people who're looking for products and services from a nearby location.

For instance, if your business is located in Frederick, Maryland, you need to target customers located within the 10 to 30 miles radius only. This is because they are the ones who are more likely to purchase your products or services than the ones who are located 50 miles away. What's more is that the

importance of local SEO is only expected to rise in the future as nowadays, users are increasingly dependent on their smartphones.

### **Mobile Usage and its Impact on Local SEO**

A recent study showed that about 56 percent on-the-go mobile searches have local intent. Quite logically, mobile users search for nearby businesses on the go as they are most likely looking for an instant solution. So, they look for the nearest business and purchase what they need.

**This is the 'I Want It Now' generation and your business needs to cater to them.**

So, if search engines are able to display your business information and website in the first fold, you'll certainly benefit from all that buying intent. These local listings will not only get higher click-through-rates (CTRs), but will also get you more customers.

If you'd like to enjoy the sweet fruits of high visibility for local searches on the search engines, here are five strategies that you can trust.

**1 – LOCAL BUSINESS DIRECTORIES:** 80 percent of consumers rely on online searches while choosing a local business! Unfortunately, not many local businesses claim their local business listings. So, before the local SEO search space saturates, ensure that you get the early mover advantage. Here's what you can do.

- You'll need to list your local business on some of the top local business directories like Yelp, Citysearch and Merchant Circle.
- Make sure your business profiles are 100% complete.
- Your business's NAP, i.e. Name, Address and Phone should be consistent across all the listings. You can also list it on aggregator networks like Factual, Neustar and Infogroup.

- Look for niche specific business directories and secure your listings there as well.

**2 – LOCAL LINK BUILDING:** You're probably wondering how it is different from link building in general. Let me tell you, it's very different indeed! In fact, it's one of the best-kept secrets of local SEO and only the most seasoned local SEO experts are good at. With local link building, you can get a lot of value from local links. This holds true even if the niche of the backlink source website is not related to your business. Quite simply, local business is all about building relationships. It holds a key position and also reflects in Google's search algorithm for local SEO. Getting local backlinks involves actually getting off your cushioned seat and taking your marketing to an absolute ground level.

Some suggestions include the following.

- Local sponsorship opportunities
- Organizing a donation drive
- Getting involved in local community events as well as their websites
- Being active on local newsgroups and portals
- Consider low-cost advertisement opportunities on local classifieds



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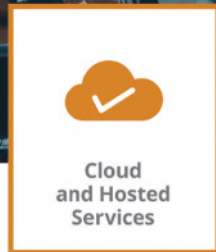
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**3 – MEASURE STORE BRANDING CAMPAIGNS:**

The above options can be expensive, especially for those local businesses that are just getting started with their local SEO efforts. For them, store branding execution campaigns can be really helpful. Local businesses can consider automation and reporting tools. They can easily set up campaigns to measure success via subscriptions, inquiries, purchases as well as footfall. Certain tools also bring together all the information and analytics from different channels in one place. This helps local stores leverage their marketing collateral from various locations for affordable, yet consistent branding and promotions.

**4 – REVIEWS AND RATINGS:**

70 percent of users are happy to leave reviews and ratings when asked and as already mentioned, about 80% people trust online reviews and ratings before purchasing any products or services. That's the power of online reviews and ratings! So, you should also focus on getting reviews on your Facebook business and Google My Business pages. If you use social media listening tools, you'll be alerted when your brand is mentioned online. You can very easily use this opportunity to ask users to leave their reviews. Using schema markup to showcase your reviews and ratings in search results is another great way to display your business on search engines.

**5 – LOCAL STRUCTURED DATA MARKUP:**

Did you know that less than one-third websites utilize structured data properly? This is true, in spite of Google repeatedly making it clear that this is what it likes. In fact, there are some useful tools which Google offers that will help you start using structured data. Structured Data Testing Tool and Data Highlighter are examples of these tools.

As it seems, 2018 will be an interesting year for local SEO. There are a number of trends in the works that can significantly alter the practice of optimizing for local searches.

Visual searches, AI and machine learning, featured snippets, and user experience are a few elements that will certainly impact local SEO strategies in 2018 and beyond. What you need to know is local SEO and SEO as a whole is very dynamic. As search engines evolve, there will be multiple opportunities to increase traffic to your website without necessarily focusing on organic SERPs.

So, you need to keep up with the latest trends and discover how your business can maintain a successful local SEO strategy. This will help you stay ahead of your competitors.

**Your Website Should Be Many Things But NEVER Just an Online Brochure**

**By Brad Good, Partner, Good Marketing Group**

Do you have a website? Is it working for you or against you? Your website should not be a static, online brochure or directory. Rather, your website needs to be your most important online marketing tool that is updated regularly with relevant content to provide the information your target audience expects quickly and in the format or device they are using. If you built your website more than five years ago, it's probably time to consider a serious upgrade or a new one entirely if you plan on growing your business and online presence.

According to AdWeek Magazine, 81% of shoppers conduct online research before buying. In addition, since 2014, smartphones and tablets exceed desktop usage. Think about that for moment. Are you speaking to 81% or are you losing 81% percent of your audience?

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So, how can you make your website be your most effective marketing tool?

STEP ONE: Make sure your website is "mobile optimized" or "responsive" which means it adjusts to the device viewing it – mobile, tablet or desktop. This is not the same as "mobile friendly!" The search engines will rank mobile optimized websites higher versus mobile friendly websites.

STEP TWO: Find out if your website is "secure." In 2018, Google and Bing will be viewing any site not "secure" as less credible. If your site does not have a HTTPS in the URL, it is NOT secure. If it's not there, don't panic just yet; your site will not be taken down from the web, it just won't rank higher in the search results than a site that is "secure" – your competitors? Contact your hosting company and find out what is needed to get a secure certificate for your website.

STEP THREE: Keep your website content current. This is extremely important. If you are not updating the content of your site on a regular basis, including images and links, this can negatively affect your

site's search results. An easy way to do this is to add a blog or news feed to your website. If you have one, keep your news or blog updated. Relevant posts should include information about issues that affect your target audience in your geographic area, training updates, how-to videos, and press releases. Then use your social media accounts to promote the recent blog/news post with a link to the page on your website for people to read more. To the search engines, this is considered credible inbound traffic to your website which helps your SEO rankings.

STEP FOUR: If you don't have time to keep your website updated OR updating your website is too confusing OR you don't think you are a good writer, hire someone – an employee or an outside vendor – to develop a new responsive website and/or keep your site updated and relevant for your target audience. You will see a return on your investment!

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