

The One-Sitting Guide to Effective Local SEO

How to Get More Visible to Customers in the Local Search Results

4th Edition



Who you are

You own, work for, or work with a business that needs more local customers, clients, or patients. You're probably focused on getting more visible in Google's local search results. But above all you want to get more business online, and in a way that doesn't require a monster advertising budget. You're not sure what to do next, what advice to try, what's involved, what the alternatives are, or what to expect.

Who I am

My name's Phil Rozek. I help business owners on local SEO and other projects they dread. I've been in this field since 2008 - when both the "local map" and the concept of local SEO were in diapers. I'm known for clear and practical advice, and for solving stubborn problems. Believe it or not, this is a fascinating and sometimes fun career (at least for me), and I'm blessed to do it for a living.

By the way, why am I giving you a *free* guide on local SEO, if that's also what I get paid for? Because a give-before-you-get approach has brought me good fortune, and because it doesn't require any more of my time to share info I've already jotted down. You can always [get my help](#) if you want it. In the meantime you get my best advice, so if you want to help yourself, the guide is all you need.

Why are you reading this?

You want clear direction on how to do your own local SEO effectively - meaning you grow your rankings and get more customers out of the deal. You don't have time to do it wrong, hire the wrong company, or muck through those gibbering "Ultimate" guides to local SEO.

Why is the guide in this format?

Because it's quickest for you to understand and to act on. The alternatives are wordy blog posts that make you feel like you're in the snow-covered hedge maze in *The Shining*, and checklists that gloss over important points and make local SEO seem to be a paint-by-numbers process.

How to get the most out of this guide

I have no idea how much you know about local SEO, or about any other area of online marketing. That's why I designed my guide to help you whether you're an old-timer, or new to it all, or somewhere in the middle. Some suggestions on how to get the most out of this guide:

- Check out the resources I link to (in column D) for more detail if you'd like to know more about any step. Rather than make you muck through a 200-page guide, I've linked to further reading so YOU can decide how much detail is the right amount. Most of those resources are blog posts I've written, which typically explain a strategy or concept in more detail than I can (or need to) shoehorn into the guide.
- Read it while you're online, preferably [in Google Sheets](#), so you can pull up the color-commentary resources if you want to. If you don't do that, I suggest downloading it as a PDF.
- Don't try to understand everything before doing anything. Read through the guide (yes, you can easily do that in one sitting, as the name suggests) work on a couple of the steps, cross them off if possible, and revisit the guide and work on a couple more steps.
- Work on the steps over time. Some steps you can only do long-term. Local SEO is a marathon.
- You can email me (phil@localvisibilitysystem.com) if you have a quick question or two.

#	One-time steps	Brief explanation	Read more info at
1	Look for risks in your current strategy, like violating the GMB guidelines, buying cheap links, etc.	Shortcuts can work great until they don't. If your ranking strategy seems easy or surefire, think about what the less-attractive backup plan is, and then either try that first or be ready to switch to it in case Plan A goes up in smoke.	Local Search Rankings Dropped? Follow These 10 Most-Useful Troubleshooting SOPs
2	Focus on a niche now if possible, and rebrand ASAP if you plan to rebrand as part of your new focus.	Local SEO is easier when you specialize rather than compete with everybody. Also, the name of your GMB page does affect rankings. For more-niche search terms you can usually rank across more geography, because Google has fewer options to show nearby.	Generic, Local-SEO-Friendly Business Names: the Pros and Cons of Using One
3	Install Google Search Console, or make sure it's collecting data.	Use the "Performance" area of Search Console to see what parts of your SEO work, and to troubleshoot rankings drops. Make sure it's collecting data BEFORE you need that data.	support.google.com/webmasters/answer/9128669?hl=en
4	Cut fluff activities - tasks that don't help your efforts in any describable way.	Post on Instagram daily or build 300 citations if you want to, but don't do it to help your rankings, because it won't. You will sink or swim based on how well you execute on the basics, not on the luxury activities.	Locus Pocus
5	Consolidate your sites (if applicable).	It's hard enough to build, continually develop, and earn good links to ONE site. With more sites you spread your work thin. Keep sites that pull their weight. Consider retiring any others, or at least not working on them for a while.	Microsites for Local SEO: the Pros and Cons
6	Fatten up the title tags of your most-important pages with a couple more "money" terms.	Hit 1-2 of your highest-priority search terms, at least a couple of the main cities where you offer it, maybe a synonym, and maybe the name of your state and/or "Near You." Work your homepage title tag extra hard, because the possible upsides are extra large.	21 Local SEO Moves & Situations I Have Never Seen a Business Penalized for
7	Bulk up your homepage with content on each service/offering and on your service area(s).	Usually the homepage has the best shot at ranking for the most or toughest terms, and in a variety of cities. But that's less likely if Google doesn't have sufficient content to grab onto. Don't go long just to go long, but because it allows you to go into detail.	Top 10 Ways Local Business Owners Botch the All-Important Homepage, and How You Can Get Yours Right
8	Add your business's name, address, and phone # to every page of your site.	You want Google to be extra clear on the cities or areas you serve or are located in. Add the business name and phone # so Google is less likely to reject or edit those fields on your GMB page. Put all locations' addresses on each page, if applicable.	10 Guidelines for Putting NAP Info on Your Site for Local SEO
9	Optimize your Google Business Profile page (create it first if necessary).	9 times out of 10, all you need to do is pick the 1-2 best-fitting categories, point the "Website" field to your homepage URL, and show your address on the map unless you're worried about privacy. There just aren't many moving parts to optimize.	Your Google My Business Page in 2017: How Hard Is It to Mess Up? (Yes, I know this post is old, but it's still applicable.)
10	Remove or merge any unwanted Google Business Profile pages.	Extraneous GBP pages can gum up the rankings of the pages you want to rank, or confuse people, or both. You can't remove them yourself at will, but you can ask Google to do this or that with them.	Can You Merge Two Google Business Profile Listings?
11	Create or correct your listings on the basic local citation sources.	The basic non-Google sites usually include Yelp, YP, Facebook, BBB, ExpressUpdate.com, and maybe 15 others. One reason they're important is Google looks to those sites to confirm the info it has on your business.	docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WMCBnDnlyxVNj3K38WaUmmeR9Iis5Y94to4oE2XBerg/edit
12	Create or correct your listings on niche (industry-specific or local) directories.	Often you can identify maybe 5 directories that are popular or influential in your industry, or in your local area. Usually those are worth creating listings on, if possible.	Niche Local Citations Don't Get Enough Love
13	Create a page on each service, product, treatment, or other offering.	If you could do ONE thing on your site to rustle up more visibility and business, creating a page on each offering would be it. You can make them rough and simple at first and improve them over time. Add plenty of internal links to them.	Service Pages and Local SEO: 20+ Principles to Make Them Your Rock-Solid Foundation

14	Create a "bio" page for each professional, each focused on his or her area(s) of expertise.	These pages can pick up organic rankings for any specialists you may have. Also, if they have their own GMB pages (sometimes a good move), point the "Website" field to their respective bio pages for extra Maps visibility.	10 Types of Ninja Pages You Can Sneak up the Local Search Results
15	Get a few Google reviews from customers and sketch out a doable system to get more.	Take extreme pains to earn a few great reviews, and then figure out how to make it easier and more systematic. Don't start off with software or other half-measures.	How Should You Ask for Online Reviews? The Pros and Cons of Each Approach
#	Long-term, ongoing steps	Brief explanation	Read more info at
1	Research keywords quickly; sift through reviews, Google Search Console, and competitors' sites.	Keyword research is more useful if you've already got some pages up and a trickle of visibility or customers. Use your findings to tune up and expand existing content, and to create more pages. You'll avoid analysis paralysis, too	10 Better Ways to Do Keyword Research for Local SEO
2	Expand existing pages with FAQs, reviews, photos, examples of recent work, internal links, etc.	You're not done with pages just because you built them and maybe put a lot of work into them. They'll produce more of what you want if you improve them continually based on what's landed in your net so far.	Top-3 Local SEO "Content" Wins for People Who Hate to Write
3	Create "spin-off" pages on specialized services/offerings and topics.	Let's say you're a veterinarian. Don't have only a "Services" page; also make one for each animal. Then also create a page on "Tooth Extractions," "Microchipping," "Deworming," etc. for EACH animal: dogs, cats, rabbits, dinosaurs, etc.	Spin-off Pages: a Bazooka for Your Local SEO
4	Add more internal links to your highest-priority pages, where appropriate.	Google heeds internal links. Some services and pages are higher priorities than others. Link to those in your main menu, in your footer, on your homepage, and on other prominent pages. Add even more internal links whenever you see another opportunity.	Internal linking for SEO: 9 practices anyone can do
5	Get a higher % of customers to write persuasive reviews on Google Maps and an alternate site.	Here's the process that usually works best: ask in-person if possible, send an email with a polite request and clear instructions, and send a follow-up about a week later. Take a few minutes to tailor each request to each customer.	60+ Questions to Troubleshoot and Fix Your Local Reviews Strategy
6	Earn a few backlinks from sites relevant to your industry, to your local area, or to both.	Most solid links only take a little time or money to get. To get them, you need to look for ways to help or contribute to sites with some relevance to your business. If you skip this process, otherwise-weak competitors with only a few decent links can beat you handily.	Dummy Links: Part of a Smart Local SEO Strategy
7	Study data in the "Performance" area of Google Search Console.	It's a candy store of data. You'll be amazed at what you can learn by studying the data under the "Pages" and "Queries" tabs. Look at a long date range (like 12 months), use filters (the "+" button), and play around with sorting the columns.	The Local SEO Data Jackpot You Missed: Google Analytics – Search Console Integration
8	Study your toughest local competitors and successful NON-competing businesses in your field.	Once in a blue moon a competitor does something smart that you can benefit from, too. You can scrounge many more good ideas if you also look farther away, at visibly strong businesses that aren't competing with you.	How Can You Tell a Competitor Does Effective Local SEO?
9	Do "spam patrol": find competitors' Google Maps spam, report it, and document the process.	Sift through Maps for competitors who are flouting Google's rules at your expense, and use the "suggest an edit" button to report them. With persistence you can thin the herd.	Google Maps Spam Patrol: Why You Need to Do It, and 10 Tips to Make It Doable
10	Leverage any hit blog posts by adding more internal links and calls-to-action for locals.	Add a noticeable paragraph in which you state your service area, link to relevant pages with more info on your services, and tell would-be customers what they should do next.	Hit Blog Post but No Local Traffic or Rankings? 7 Ways to Make That Post Help Your Local SEO Effort
11	Leverage your reviews: put them on your site, expand or create pages based on them, etc.	You can't assume people on your site saw your reviews in Google, or that they saw your best reviews. Plus, reviews are content you didn't have to write personally. Use them to strengthen existing pages and/or to create new pages.	The Ridiculous Hidden Power of Local Reviews: Umpteen Ways to Use Them to Get More Business
12	Create and optimize brief YouTube videos on niche topics AND embed them on your site.	Don't try to go "viral" or be fancy. Instead, make quick-and-dirty videos on specialized questions or topics and rack up views by putting those videos on your site. Within those parameters, do the videos in whatever way works for you.	Using YouTube to Pull More Freight for Your Local SEO
13	Cultivate internal resources (logs, checklists, etc.) instead of paying for software, when possible.	You should be able to fly and land the plane without a lot of instruments, because you may not always have them. Also, you'll save a ton of money and get a better sense of what goes into effective SEO.	30+ Internal Resources Every Serious Local SEO-er Should Have or Develop
14	Develop a few non-Google sources of visibility and business.	Google is not your friend. Even when everything's going well for you, Google is fickle. Cultivating non-Google and preferably some offline sources of business may take a while, but the peace of mind alone is worth the effort.	Local SEO without the Local Map: What Is It?
15	Keep reading my posts and newsletter emails (and get help personally if you want it).	It's easy to overload yourself on so-called "SEO news," or to tune out altogether. Neither extreme will help you much. My info helps you focus on the biggest problems you've got now, so you can get back to whatever else you need or want to do.	localvisibilitysystem.com
#	Principles of an effective local SEO strategy	Brief explanation	Find more info at
1	Everything has a cost.	What will you put time into? What's the cost of "cheap" help? What is the cost of focusing on rankings over everything else? Wherever you want to go, the ticket isn't free.	youtu.be/gYFA7IR12k
2	You're never "done."	The results you want will take persistence to get, protect, and improve on. Doesn't mean you should spend all your time on SEO. But it does mean you'll need to keep SEO in mind and always work an angle, for as long as you want more business.	One-Time Work vs. Ongoing Work in Local SEO
3	Hit it hard before you're "ready."	You'll never understand everything. The landscape will keep changing. Most turns of events and tasks will be a PITA. But that's also the case for your competitors. Get it on.	11 Gen. George Patton Quotes That Show His Strategic Awesomeness
4	Don't try to outsource everything.	Some parts of SEO you must do in-house. For the parts you CAN have someone else do, either you can just spend money and hope it works out, or you can handle it yourself, learn a thing or two, and save money.	When Should You Do Your Own Local SEO?
5	Do work your competitors won't.	The harder you work, the luckier you get. Just as customers need clear reasons to pick you over competitors, so does Google.	What Parts of Your Local SEO Can Competitors NOT Steal?
6	Work on your persuasiveness from the start.	Think about what happens <i>after</i> the click. Make your site clearer and better at addressing would-be customers' questions and concerns. Don't toil for better rankings only to find out they don't mean more money for you.	Secret Weapon of Effective Local SEO: Wordsmithing
7	"Local" SEO is mostly organic SEO.	Effective local SEO is organic SEO (i.e. site + backlinks) with 2 basic twists: local listings and reviews. If you obsess over Google Maps rankings, not only will your local organic rankings be a soft spot, but also your Maps rankings won't be as strong.	Relationship between Local and Organic SEO: a Simple Diagram
8	Create multiple ways to rank for the same term.	Often the page you want to rank for a term isn't the page that DOES rank for that term. Also, if your high-ranking page drops or your Maps rankings drop (or both), you want another page that's ready to parachute in.	Thin Local Rankings: Why and How to Think Thick, Not High
9	Don't just react to others.	Finally started outranking a tough competitor? Great! Now keep working. Got a crazy idea, but don't see any competitors doing it? Be the first and maybe the only. Make your competitors react to YOU and you'll have the upper hand.	Local SEO Fairy Tale: No Problems = Good Rankings
10	Square all SEO ideas with your common sense.	All solid SEO strategy makes sense on an intuitive level, if you're clear on what the advice is. If an idea doesn't make sense, there's still a chance it's good, but keep it on a short leash.	Is Your Local SEO Person Shell-Shocked, Gun-Shy, and TOO Afraid of Angering Google? How to Avoid the Phobias