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the Internet

Driving Business with Local Search

Your Customers Are Looking For You!

WSI White Paper

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Driving Business with Local Search: Your Customers Are Looking For You!

Introduction

Small businesses are the lifeblood of countries all over the world. In the USA, small businesses are generally defined by the SBA (US Small Business Association) as those that have:

- 500 or fewer employees
- US\$7 million or less in annual receipts

There are an estimated 29.6 million small businesses in the United States, and they:

- Employ just over half of the country's private sector workforce
- Represent 97.3% of all the exporters of goods
- Represent 99.7% of all employer firms
- Generate a majority of the innovations that come from United States companies

Similarly, the EU defines them as those having fewer than 250 employees, and up to €50 million in annual revenue. There are 23 million enterprises, providing 75 million jobs:

- 91% of all EU businesses have 1-9 employees ("Micro")
- 7% have 10-49 employees
- 1% have 50-250 employees
- 1% are defined as "large enterprises"
- Over 2/3 of all private sector jobs across the continent

For the business owner, it has never been more important to be found in their local town, city or region for people who are already looking for them. Over 60% of us prefer to do business with a local business in our own neighborhood. This includes all kinds of "wallet-ready" businesses such as auto repair shops, electricians, hair salons, attorneys, restaurants, and so on. Each of these businesses has plenty of local competition. Furthermore, competition for placement on the search engines is stiff.

How can a business stand out and easily be found by those who are searching for them?

Maps Applications

Each of the major search engines (Google, Yahoo!, Bing) has a business mapping application that allows businesses to set up or claim their own business listing, associate it with a physical address, and provide more information to the consumer who is looking for them.

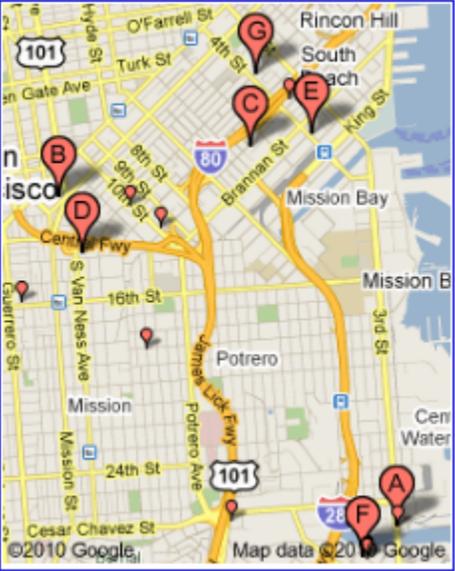
For instance, if a searcher types in "electricians" into the Google search bar, it will return millions of results (the first 10 being displayed on page 1 of course). However, Google assumes that the person doing the search is looking for a local business, not all electricians. By mapping the unique IP (internet

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protocol) address of their computer to the city that they hit the Internet with, and shows up to seven results for “electricians near xyz city”.

Another example might be that the person searches for “windshield replacement, san francisco, ca” meaning she is looking for a company that will replace her windshield in her particular location. Again, the major search engines will return a map with several businesses listed for her.

Local business results for **windshield replacement** near **San Francisco, CA**



- A** [Auto Glass San Francisco](http://www.415autoglass.com)
www.415autoglass.com - (415) 336-4454 - 5 reviews
- B** [SaveOn Glass](http://saveonglass.com)
saveonglass.com - (415) 487-7800 - 12 reviews
- C** [San Francisco MAZ](http://www.mtsautosf.com)
www.mtsautosf.com - (415) 995-2004 - 22 reviews
- D** [GlassAll - Auto Glass Replacement](http://www.glassall.com)
www.glassall.com - (415) 431-3202 - 26 reviews
- E** [Safelite Auto Glass: S. San Francisco](http://www.safelite.com)
www.safelite.com - (415) 357-5012 - 15 reviews
- F** [Glass Pro](http://www.autoglass4you.com)
www.autoglass4you.com - (415) 457-5205 - 69 reviews
- G** [A+ Auto Glass](http://www.aplusglasspro.com)
www.aplusglasspro.com - (415) 848-3012 - 4 reviews

[More results near San Francisco, CA »](#)

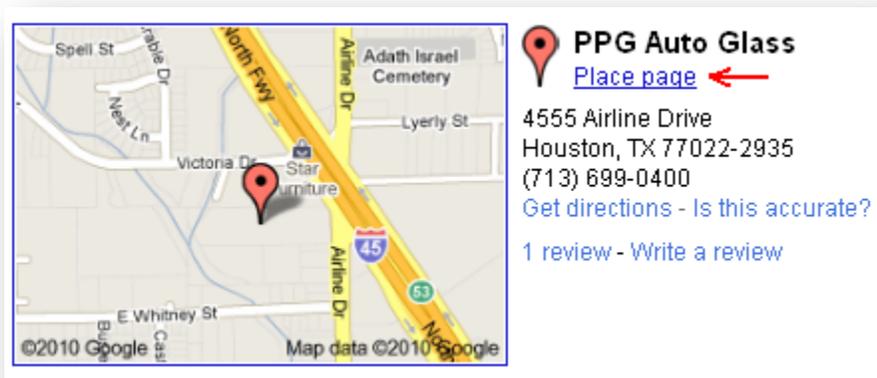
Even though there are nearly 200,000 search results for that specific phrase (this is their competition!), the map is quite handy to get a business to the very top of the search engine results page (SERP).

Claim Your Business Listing

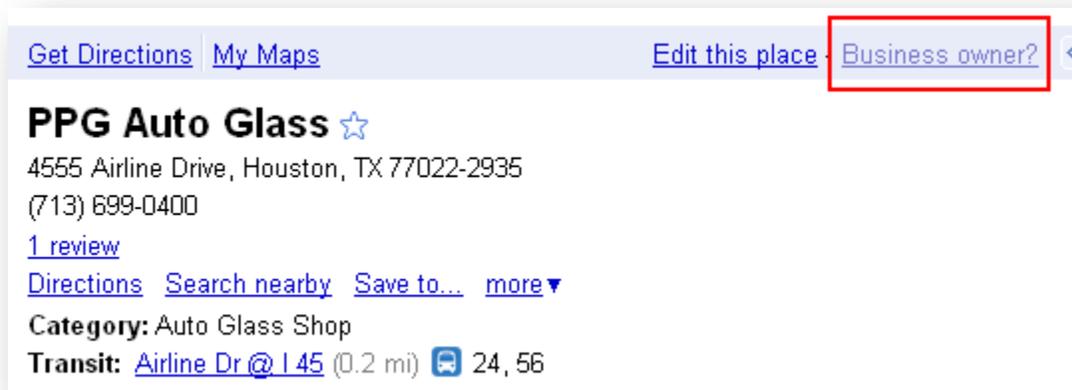
Many times, a business will get a listing in these maps applications automatically, because they are in one of the major business databases. These listings may or may not have current information, and tend to have sparse information (address, phone number, and business type).

Search for your own business name + location in any of the major search engines, and look to see if your business is listed.

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Click the link for "Place Page" to go to your listing. If you see that the listing hasn't been validated, because it has a link to "Business Owner?" above your name, you need to claim your listing.



Note that if you do not claim your listing, someone else may, and put false or incorrect information in for your business!

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Once you create a free account for yourself, fill out the business listing as completely as possible. Make sure you fill out every single box on the page.

Google allows you to upload ten photographs and five videos (from YouTube). Make the first image you upload your logo. Then it will be associated with your business listing. The other photos can be of your staff (with their permission), your premises, happy customers (again with their permission), or anything else you deem to be important for your customers to see.

Here's a different company's listing with their logo next to their name.



You can create a free YouTube account and upload five short (1 minute) videos. Just use a cell phone video camera or other low cost camera to create some short testimonials, service summaries, or intro from the business owner or staff. Link those to your business listing, and this will help complete your business listing.

The more complete your listing is, the more you'll bubble to the top.

Finally, make sure your categories are completely filled out with all the business services you offer. The categories have the most influence over your position in the maps than any other information you provide.

Once you've completed these steps, each of the search engines will have you go through a very short process to get your listing verified. For instance, Google will call your phone number and ask you to enter a PIN.

Get Listed Without a Website!

If you're a business owner who doesn't have a website or, due to franchise rules, isn't allowed to have a personal website, you can freely create and claim your business listing, and get to the very top of the search engines for your particular services. All you need is a physical address and a phone number (your cell phone can be your business number).

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Get Data About Your Listing

One of the benefits of having claimed your Google Places listing is that you get to see data about how many times your listing showed up, and more importantly, how many people clicked on your listing.



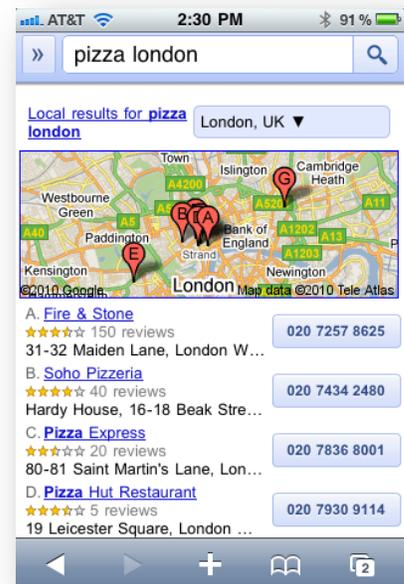
“Impressions” are how many times your listing showed up. “Actions” are how many times someone did something like clicked your listing, asked for driving directions, and so on.

Mobile Local Search

A recent report* claims that Google dominates mobile searches by nearly 100%. Looking at a sample size of data from 3 million sites, they arrive at this conclusion. Indeed the default search for the Safari browser on the iPhone is Google. When doing a search for pizza in London, it immediately comes up with a Google Places listing that is optimized for the phone interface.

With an estimated 4.6 billion cell phones in use around the world (Wikipedia), it’s clear that getting your listing claimed and optimized for the Google Places listing is absolutely critical for consumers who are looking for their local restaurant or other destination.

* <http://royal.pingdom.com/2010/07/29/google-undisputed-heavyweight-champion-of-mobile-search>



Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for Local Search

Optimizing for Cities

Many business owners understand that a good, professionally designed website is critical to attract new clients and customers. Their customers will search for them on the search engines, look at their website and make a determination before they ever call or step in your front door.

It's relatively easy to get a website set up for the search engines for local search. It's also easy to go down the futile path of trying to get listed for extremely generic and highly competitive phrases such as "auto repair shops" (3,000,000 results in Google for that phrase).

Instead, by focusing on your local market, you can get your business listed for people who are searching for you in your neighborhood. For instance, the search phrase "auto repair shops, walnut creek, ca" only returns 100,000 results, most of which are accidental listings.

Create a page of content on your website for each city and phrase that you want to get listed. The Title and Description tags should include that phrase and city location. The page should also contain content about that specific phrase and city. Sprinkle the name of the city throughout the page.

Repeat this process for each phrase you want listed. It's very likely that you won't have much competition for these niche phrases, and the search engines will reward you with top placement.

As an example, here's an electrical contractor that shows up both in the Google Places maps and with two listings just below the map. One link is specific for Livermore, which is intended to attract people who are specifically looking for an electrician in Livermore.

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The screenshot shows a Google search for "electrician livermore". The search results include a sponsored link for "Livermore Electrician" and a list of local business results for "electrician near Livermore, CA". A map shows the location of these businesses in Livermore, CA. The search results are as follows:

- Sponsored link:** www.LivermoreElectricians.com Expert **Livermore Electrician!** Trusted, Safe, On-time 925-952-7839
- Local business results for electrician near Livermore, CA:**
 - A** [Gentec Electrical Services](http://www.gentecservices.com) - (925) 373-1682 - 1 review
 - B** [Livermore Electrician](http://livermore-electrician.homestead.com) - (925) 208-4756 - 1 review
 - C** [Precision Electric](http://www.precisionelectricusa.com) - (925) 337-2144 - 10 reviews
 - D** [Maine Electric](http://www.maineelectricinc.com) - (925) 443-3377 - More
 - E** [General Wholesale Electric Supply](http://www.genwes.com) - (925) 960-8790 - More
 - F** [Brown & Fesler](http://maps.google.com) - (925) 960-9150 - 2 reviews
 - G** [Tri-Valley Electrical Services Inc](http://www.trivalleyelectrical.com) - (209) 835-8081 - More
- SF Bay Area CA Electricians & Electrical Contractors - Commercial ...**
GENTEC Electrical Services P.O. Box 2654. Livermore, CA 94551. Phone: 1-800-391-6517. Fax: 1-925-373-0686. CA contractors license# 783310 ...
www.gentecservices.com/ - Cached - Similar
- Livermore Electrical Contractors & Electricians: We serve ...**
Need Livermore electricians or electrical contractors? We are Diamond Certified electricians and service Livermore, CA & the surrounding area.
www.gentecservices.com/Bay...livermore-electrical-contractors.html - Cached

Optimizing for Zip Codes

Similarly, people do search by postal code (zipcode in the USA). As an example, they might search for "auto repair 94583". Be sure to include your postal code in the Title or Description META tags and content on that same page for that specific city. You'll have very little competition for this, **because no one else is doing this step.**

Your customers will love that you have taken the time to build these specific pages just for them, and they've found exactly what they're looking for.

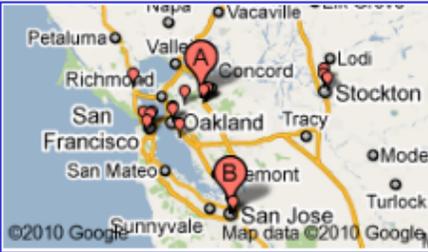
Here's an example of a law firm that has optimized for postal codes. If you choose "View" "Page Source" from your browser, you'll see that they have their postal codes embedded in the META "Description" tag.

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slip and fall lawyer 94596 Search

About 10,300 results (0.17 seconds) Advanced search

[Local business results for slip and fall lawyer near Walnut Creek, CA 94596](#)



A [Law Offices of Michael J. Reed](#) - www.michaelreedattorney.com
1547 Palos Verdes Mall, Walnut Creek - (925) 743-8353
[Directions, hours, and more »](#)

B [Bostwick & Janoff](#) - www.bostwickandjanoff.com
111 West Saint John Street #1040, San Jose - (408) 286-2300
1 review, [directions, hours, and more »](#)

[More results near Walnut Creek, CA 94596 »](#)

Slip & Fall Lawyer in Walnut Creek: Need an attorney because of a ...
Need a **slip and fall attorney** in Walnut Creek or Concord California? You need a **lawyer** who knows how to handle these types of injury cases.
www.wschottlaw.com/personal-injury/slip-and-fall.aspx - [Cached](#)

Online Review Sites

It's becoming more common for your customers to rate you and tell all their friends about how good (or bad!) you are. Yelp is a very common tool that originally started as a place for people to praise or pan their local restaurant. It has quickly grown into all other businesses, and can be found around the world.

Yelp results typically show up high in the search engine results pages and direct searchers to a specific page. There the searcher will find a list of businesses, some good and some bad. As an example, "carpet cleaners, pleasanton, ca" returns this result:

[Pleasanton Carpet Cleaning](#)

24 businesses reviewed for **Carpet Cleaning** in **Pleasanton** on Yelp. Read about places like: Spotless, Glover's Deep Steam **Carpet Cleaning**, Hands on Earth ...
www.yelp.com/c/pleasanton-ca/carpet_cleaning - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

This is free advertising for your business. Furthermore, the Yelp results get incorporated into your Google Places (maps) listing mentioned above as "Reviews". Make sure you claim or create your own business listing in Yelp, or whatever your local favorite tool is. Again, add as much relevant information about your company that you can. You can include photos, videos, product information or whatever you want. Next, encourage your happy clients to review you. The more positive reviews you receive, the more you'll bubble up to the top of the listing, and above all your competition.

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Be very careful not to get too many reviews at once! They do monitor it, and if they see reviews coming from the same computer (like your own) or a lot of them at once, they may deactivate your listing for violating their terms of service. Ask your customers a few at a time, and spread them out over a long time (months).

An example of a carpet cleaning company that takes his Yelp listing very seriously is “Spotless”. The first one in yellow has a paid account, and shows up at the top because of it (yet his reviews are only 4½ stars). However, “Spotless” has five solid stars and 31 raving happy reviews, so he shows up at the very top of the free listings.

Sponsored Result

Pro Care Systems
Category: Carpet Cleaning
Location: San Jose, CA
Special Offer

11 reviews
15133 San Pablo Avenue
San Jose, CA 95127
(408) 272-1970

... He did such an **AWESOME** job on our condo's **carpet** and stairs. We've tried several different ways of **cleaning** stains as well as renting a **carpet** cleaner machine at Home Depot, but nothing compared to...

1. Spotless
Category: Carpet Cleaning

31 reviews
2843 Hopyard Rd
Pleasanton, CA 94566
(925) 600-0745

I cannot begin to describe how happy I am with the service I received from Spotless **carpet cleaning**. My **carpets** have never looked this **clean** and I had the service done a month and a half ago. They

2. Glover's Deep Steam Carpet Cleaning
Category: Carpet Cleaning

1 review
2843 Hopyard Rd
Pleasanton, CA 94588
(925) 462-4262

John Glover has to be one of the most sincere and respected **carpet** cleaners in the East Bay. His attention to detail and genuine concern about the condition of our materials is refreshing

3. Hands on Earth Friendly Carpet Cleaning
Category: Carpet Cleaning

2 reviews
Pleasanton, CA 94566

All of these reviews also show up in his Google Places listing, so whether his customers find him on Google or Yelp, they'll see all the terrific testimonials.

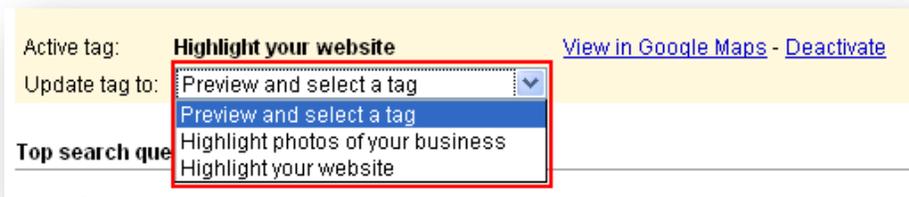
Stand Out from the Crowd

Even with all these steps, it may still be difficult to stand out from all your competition. Do what you can to make your business look unique from everyone else.

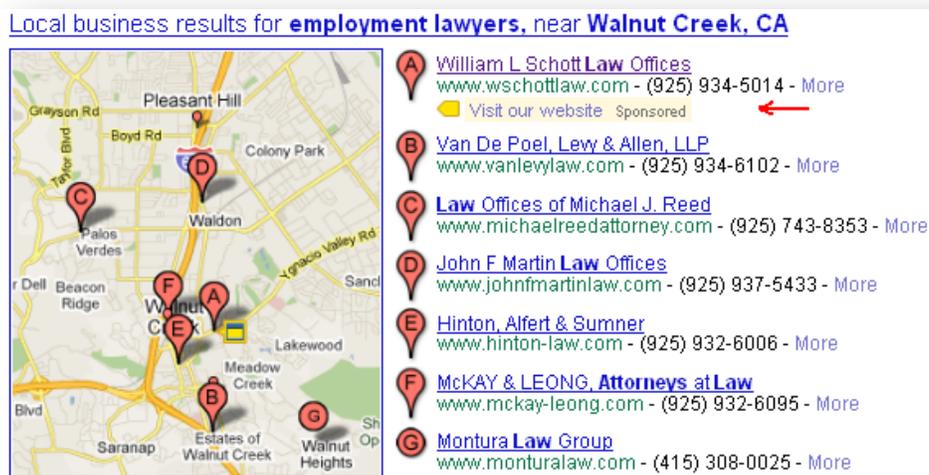
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For example, Google Places has a new feature called “tags”. For US\$25 per month, you can “tag” your business listing with a small sponsored link that takes the person either to your website or online video. When you’re being compared against all the other generic listings, this is a low cost way of getting your listing to stand out from the crowd (see red arrow in example search).

In your Google Places listing, it will ask you if you want to add a tag. You can point it to a photograph, a video or to your website. You can only point it to a video or a photo, however, if you’ve uploaded either or both into your Google Places listing:



As soon as you’ve set this up, your listing will now have a yellow tag and link next to it that makes it stand out from the rest of your competition.



This sponsored link does not in any way affect your position in the list of seven businesses, but when your listing looks like all the rest, the little yellow tag makes you stand out from the crowd.

Google also provides analytics data to see how many people actually clicked on your tag to look at your video or visit your website. This is very useful data!

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Conclusion

Small businesses drive the bulk of the economy in the world, and most of us prefer to do business with one in our neighborhood. We develop a personal relationship with these owners, and it's easier to travel to their office. The search engines are a rich source of free leads to a smart business owner's front door, and they provide many free or inexpensive ways to get ahead of your competition on the next block.

Resources

The following web addresses are available for you to get set up. You must create an account for yourself on each site to manage your listings. In most cases, there are country-specific versions of each (like www.google.co.uk or www.yelp.fr).

Google Places (Maps): <http://www.google.com/local/add/businessCenter>

Yahoo! Business Listing: <http://listings.local.yahoo.com/>

Bing Maps: <http://www.bing.com/maps>

Yelp: <http://www.yelp.com>

About the Author



Thomas Petty is an expert in the use of the search engines as a marketing tool. He is an Internet Marketing Consultant in the San Francisco California area, and has been with WSI since 2005. He is sought-after as a speaker on many search engine marketing topics. He also teaches hands-on workshops to business owners who want to learn how to get their own businesses listed high in the search engines. He is only one of about 2500 HFI Certified Usability Analysts™ in the world.

If you have any questions, please email education@wsicorporate.com.