

Local SEO Checklist



MOZ
L O C A L

Technical website criteria

Everything that applies to traditional SEO also applies to Local SEO.

Regardless of business model, every local business website needs to be indexable, error-free, multi-device compliant, well-structured and properly optimized.

See the [complete technical checklist](#).

In addition to the above, local website optimization requires that you:

- Have a "Contact Us" page featuring the complete name, address, and phone number of each of your staffed locations.
- If you have 10 or less locations, the complete name, address and phone number of each should be in the sitewide footer element.
- Use Schema markup of your location data. See [Adding Schema Location Markup to Your Website](#) and [Local Business Schema Q&A with David Deering](#) for basic and advanced knowledge.
- Your phone number is highly visible on your website and clickable on mobile devices.
- Your name, address, and phone number (NAP) is consistent everywhere it is mentioned on your website. Beware of naming discrepancies for any business or mixing up NAP elements between multi-location companies or multi-practitioner businesses.
- All location pages are linked to from a high level navigation menu.
- If you want to keep your street address private, don't publish it on your website, but do be sure you're providing a phone number that is staffed during stated business hours.

Getting local content right

Content is an important part of any SEO effort, so make sure you're not tripping yourself up with thin or duplicate content. Here's a list of common content mistakes followed by a checklist of ways to increase the local SEO impact of your content.

Content mistakes to avoid

1. Don't scrape content from other websites, even from the websites of manufacturers or authorities, unless you are publishing an attributed quote within your own, unique content.
 2. If you offer the same services or products in multiple cities, think carefully about attempting to create a unique page for every possible city/keyword combination. Only embark on this plan if you know you have sufficient resources of time, money and talent to create truly high quality pages for each combination. Avoid publishing thin or useless pages. If you know you don't have the resources, it's better to go with just a strong page for each city and a strong page for each service, rather than creating lots of thin or duplicate city/keyword combo pages.
 3. Think long and hard before deciding to take a multi-website approach, even if your company offers multiple services or has multiple offices. Numerous experts agree that it is almost always better to build a single, powerhouse website that promotes your brand and all of its services and branches rather than dividing up time, funding and talent between multiple websites. For more on this, see [this community discussion](#).
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Ways to create unique, user- and search-friendly content

- Utilize testimonials from customers in your service cities to make your city landing pages unique.
 - Use unique testimonials from customers who have used specific products or services for related product and service pages.
 - Build an on-site blog to continue to develop your library of content once your basic, static web pages have been built. Freshness can help you rank for an ever-growing number of terms that relate to your business.
 - Videos and images are page content, too. Use appropriate tags to label them in real text and consider writing out transcriptions.
 - Offer city, service, or product-specific specials, schedules or calendars to differentiate what you do in one location vs. another. For example, a schedule of yoga classes at one branch vs. another or a special on tree trimming that rotates from one service city to another, ensuring unique, interesting content on different pages.
 - Include bios of different staff at different locations to introduce customers to the people who will be serving them.
 - Sponsor events, teams, or organizations in different cities and write about those sponsorships.
 - Host or participate in events in different cities as an opportunity for unique content.
 - Interview experts, within or outside of your company to create city or product-specific content.
 - Offer tips that apply to specific geographic or demographic audiences.
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Citations

Citations are complete or partial references to your name, address, phone number or website (NAP+W) anywhere on the web. [Learn more.](#)

Citation basics

- Build a unique set of citations for every physical office and be sure the name, address, phone number and website URL are absolutely correct on each citation you build.
 - Variance in abbreviations from platform to platform is normal (street vs. st. or # vs. suite). Know the [acceptable abbreviations](#).
 - Only build citations for real physical locations. P.O. boxes and virtual offices are not acceptable.
 - Understand [how local business data moves through the local search ecosystem](#), because a problem on one platform can lead to replications of the problem elsewhere.
 - For multi-location or multi-practitioner businesses, point the website link on all citations to the correct corresponding landing page on the website. For example, point your Chicago citations to your Chicago landing page on the website and point Joe Miller's citations to Joe Miller's page on your law firm website.
 - Most local businesses will want to be listed on the same set of major local business data platforms to start with, but beyond this, build citations on additional platforms that are specific to your industry or geography, such as the Chamber of Commerce, a contractor's association, or the local newspaper.
 - If you don't want your address to be public anywhere, as in the case of many service area or home-based businesses, you can still build citations, but only on those [platforms which support hidden addresses](#).
 - Beware of duplicate citations – see Duplicates section, in following pages.
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Automated or manual citation building: your choice

Building manual citations

You can choose to build all citations manually, keeping track of their existence, status, and progress in a spreadsheet. The main benefit of this path is more direct control over your listings; the main drawback is the considerable amount of time manual creation and management involves, including time involved to update all citations if a business re-brands or moves. If you'd like to try manual management, these resources will acquaint you with top citations you will want to build:

- [Where to get citations](#)
- [The best citation sources by US city](#)
- [The best local citations by category](#)
- [Top 100 International Citation Sites](#)
- [Be Where Your Customers Are with Local Business Listings](#)

Automated citation building

You can choose to pay for either manual or automated citation building instead of doing the work yourself. The main benefit of this path is a savings in time and ease of making updates across multiple citations at once if a business moves or re-brands; the main drawback is that not all services are of equal quality and some may cause problems rather than resolving them.

With most citation services you will have somewhat less direct control over your local business listings, but if the product is good, this is not normally a major problem. The main thing is to be sure that any service you consider is building important citations rather than selling fluff and that there are not known problems being alleged regarding the way the service is sold or managed.

If you are considering purchasing a citation building service, [read this comparison guide](#).

Even if you do pay to have citations built for you, in some cases, you may want to augment this by building some citations manually on specific, niche sites that aren't offered in agency packages.

Duplicate listing clean-up

Duplicates sap your listing strength so detecting and resolving them is key. Use these tools and tips to get those duplicates cleaned up:

- Make basic duplicate listing detection on a variety of platforms easier with the use of a free tool like [Moz Check Listing](#).
- Advanced detection of Google duplicates requires special efforts. A combination of paid tools + knowing how to write query strings, as described [here](#), should help you surface as many Google duplicates as possible.
- You have several options for resolving Google-based duplicates, but Map Maker may be your best bet. [Read more](#).

Earning reviews

Given their power as a ranking and conversion factor, reviews are must-haves for every local business. Follow these steps to earn reviews:

- Be sure your business is properly listed on the main review platforms, including the majors like Google My Business, Yelp and Facebook.
- Be sure you haven't overlooked industry or geography-specific review sites and are properly listed there.
- Google reviews are believed to have the greatest impact on Google local rankings. Generating a shareable Google review link can be challenging, but [these tips](#) will teach you how.
- Before you start asking for reviews on any platform, be sure you know its guidelines. [Here](#) you'll find links to major platform guidelines. Do pay close attention to the guidelines of Google and Yelp which are very particular!
- Be sure you've considered every possible way you might earn reviews from your customers. [These tips](#) will help.
- Don't set up a review station/kiosk at your place of business to ask for reviews. Always have customers leave reviews under their own accounts, using their own devices.

Earning reviews (continued)

- Don't confuse reviews with testimonials. Think of reviews as content on third-party websites and testimonials as content you publish on your own website. On-site testimonials can be published on your website on behalf of customers, but [Google reps have stated](#) that they prefer these not to be marked up with review Schema. Or, you can add a review widget to your website to have customers directly leave their own reviews.
- Don't ask for too many reviews at once, at any time. A sudden influx of reviews can lead to filtering on some platforms. A slow, steady trickle over time is better than a sudden wave.
- Understand that review acquisition is an ongoing process you'll be engaged in for the life of your business online. It's not a set-and-forget project.
- Know that nearly every business will receive at least some negative reviews at some point in its history. Your greatest preventative measure against negative reviews is your consistent dedication to excellent customer service and excellent work. Be sure you are monitoring all review sites for red flags that quality has fallen off. Do respond to negative reviews with accountability and professionalism ([these tips](#) will help), and do respond to positive reviews, as well, taking time to publicly thank your loyal customers.

Social media for local businesses

Avoid wasting effort and money by identifying the right social platforms for your business's clientele. Maximize the return on your investment:

- Consider the [most popular social media sites](#).
 - Bear in mind that Google Plus has gone through a major overhaul and is currently being promoted as a [purely social, rather than local, platform](#).
 - Try [these tips](#) for identifying which social platforms are already popular with your customer base.
 - Designate a person or persons on your staff whose regular duty it is to monitor and participate on your chosen sites. Don't let profiles stagnate.
 - 99% of your job as a social media participant is to help others, not to sell to them. Work to identify opportunities to be helpful, whether that's answering a question, offering a resource, or brightening a day for somebody.
 - Know that social media can be a hit-and-miss experience for any business. You will likely try several platforms and strategies before finding a niche that works for you. Get inspired by the [success stories of others](#).
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Out there in the real world

All online local efforts are but a reflection of offline realities and goals. Be sure you're getting it right where it counts most by remembering:

- No amount of marketing can replace good business practices. Don't hire employees without committing to train them in basic communication, customer service and the specs of your products and services. Don't let any employee represent your business who hasn't been trained to represent it well. Given the power of online reviews, the costs of a lack of training are too high.
 - Implement quality controls to keep on top of emerging issues. As the business owner, you must know your products and services, know of customer complaints, and be physically present in your place of business to monitor how your staff is serving the public. Hold regularly-scheduled meetings to correct problems, reinforce policies, and offer new education.
 - Learn how to deal with conflict while maintaining your self-esteem, and teach this to your staff, too. Whether you are dealing with an unrealistic, crazy customer or one who is justifiably disappointed in some aspect of your business, know that you can apologize and make amends without that meaning you are a bad person. Making peace with customers and making things right for them actually makes you a very cool, adept person, indeed!
 - Local Search has often been touted as the total replacement of all older forms of offline advertising, but this is not true for all businesses. Yellow Pages, billboards, local radio, and local TV advertising are still viable and lucrative forms of advertising for some industries and some geographies.
 - Remember that everything you do, whether online or off, is unified by a single goal: to make your brand the one that comes to a neighbor's mind when he or she needs a product or service you offer. Don't limit yourself to the basics of website development, citation building, earning reviews, or participating in online social environments. Building local brand awareness can also be achieved through your physical participation in community events and organizations. Get out there and meet your neighbors by attending meetings and conferences, contributing to celebrations, sponsoring teams, and making local newspaper headlines with your outreach into the community.
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Summing up

There are many theories about “effective frequency” – the number of times a person needs to be exposed to advertising before making a response to it. Some say the golden number is seven, but not everyone agrees.

What you can feel confident about is that all of the above steps represent efforts you are making to put your brand out there for the consideration of your potential customers, and the golden opportunity for local businesses is that their competition is limited by specific geography.

You don't have to compete against the whole world, but rather, be a consistent, reliable resource for your own neighbors. Be in the right places, at the right times, pair that with great service, and your local business has every chance of succeeding.

