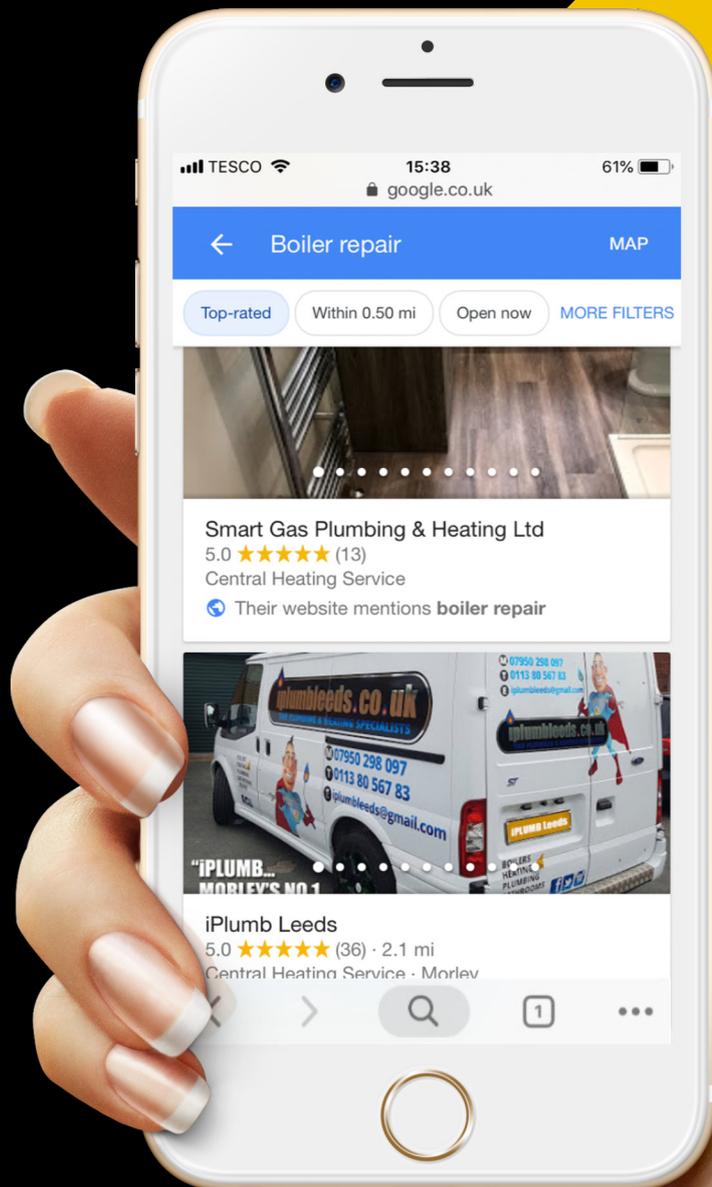


Guide to growing your business with Local SEO



1. What is Local Search?

Around 50% of all mobile consumers who search for a local business visit that day. 18% of those users end up making a purchase. 1 in 3 searches has local intent and if your company relies on local consumer traffic, then the importance of making your business visible in the SERP's (Search Engine Results Pages) should be obvious.

But what exactly is Local Search?

- Local Search is any search that is aimed at finding something within a specific geographical area.
- Local Search is looking for information online with an intention of making a transaction offline. E.g. "ATM in Leeds".
- Anything that you would traditionally look for in a directory such as the Yellow Pages, becomes a local search when you do so online. E.g. "Butchers on Random Street".

So, just about anyone who conducts any business offline has the potential to be affected by local search.

The Most Important Factors in Local SEO

The most important factors that search engines take into consideration are:

- Distance - How far each potential search result is from the location term specified in the search. If a user doesn't specify their location in their search, then Google will calculate distance based on what is known about the users location.
- Relevance - This refers to how well a local listing matches what the user is searching for. Ensuring that you have detailed business information across the internet will help Google better understand your business and make sure that it matches your listing to relevant searches.
- Prominence - Some places are prominent in the offline world and search results endeavor to reflect this in local ranking. This is also based on information that Google has about a business from across the internet. Reviews and score are also factored in to the prominence of a business local ranking.



2. Local **SEO** Strategy

Having a Local SEO strategy in place alongside your global SEO strategy is highly recommended. Firstly, your customers need to be able to find you. Secondly, you need to make sure that you own all your online real estate. This includes citations across online directories. Most of the local citations are free and serve to boost your visibility.

Your goal should be within the local and organic listings using the following tools:

- Ensure that the local NAP citations are consistent across the directories that are most relevant for your industry.
- Claim and verify your Google My Business listing.
- Optimise citations.
- Remove duplicate listings.
- Add local Business and Review Schema to your website.
- Optimise on-site content to be geo-targeted.
- Respond to directory reviews.
- Consistently build local links.

If you're not showing up within the local search results, you're missing a huge opportunity to grow your local business.



3. How to Setup a Google Business Page

More than 90% of online journeys start with a search engine, it comes as no surprise that search engines provide their own local business listings.

Google now has around 1.17 billion users worldwide, presenting a fantastic opportunity for small businesses who can now reach a huge number of people online who may be interested in their products or services. It's no small wonder then that so many local businesses have already made use of a Google Business listing.

A listing on Google My Business is one of the best, free digital marketing resources right now and plays a critical role in helping you get more customers when they search for you. Google Business pages was created to help small businesses become more visible within Google search, maps and Google+.

What is a Google My Business Listing?

A Google My Business listing combines all your important information, providing a brief description of your business, opening hours, contact details, website link etc and displays it across Google search, maps and Google+. This makes interaction with your customers easier and allowing them to leave good reviews which is great for attracting new customers.

When a user begins a search for localized terms in Google, they will be presented with a few relevant local listings tailored to the search term used. From there, the user can call your business, visit your website, find out your opening hours and even check out reviews from your customers.

What are the Benefits of a Google My Business Listing?

Aside from the obvious benefit of it being free, setting up a Google My Business Page will open lots of new avenues for driving customers to your site. From the Google My Business dashboard you can:

- Add or update your contact information, opening hours, website and more.
- Keep engaged with your customers by responding to their reviews.
- Allow potential customers to find you on Google Maps.
- Allow your customers to see up and coming events.
- Allow customers to find your shop, office or warehouse on Google Maps.

Your Google Business listing is also an extremely effective local SEO (Search Engine Optimization). The categories for a profile that Google provides allow businesses to enter all their key information and as a result, businesses have a much better chance of being ranked well in Google Search.

By entering the geographical information, your business will also appear on Google Maps, meaning that your shop, office or warehouse will be visible and catalogued on maps which has huge potential for attracting new customers.

How to set up your Google My Business page

Fortunately, you can set up your Google Business Page in a few very simple steps.

1. If you haven't already, set up a Google account. This again is extremely simple and shouldn't take more than a few minutes.
2. Head over to Google My Business and select "Start Now" at which point, you'll be asked to log in using the details of the Google account you set up earlier.
3. A search menu will appear. All you need to do now is enter your business name and address. You may already be an established business and may already exist on Google, in which case, a suggested listing will appear for you – just click on the suggested result and add complete any missing details. Otherwise you will need to create a listing if you're a newer business. All you will need to do is select Add your business and complete the necessary details.
4. You will be asked to choose a Category for your business – this is important as it will determine how Google will categorize your business and what search results you will appear in. There are pre-existing categories to choose from so make sure you choose the best fit for you. You will also get the chance to add up to 4 more later on in the process.

5. Once you've completed all the necessary information, you will need to wait for Google to verify that your business is where you say it is. Google will send you a verification PIN either by postcard, text, or automated phone call depending on which one you opt for. Text is very handy as it means you can straight on and complete the process.
6. Once you've received your PIN, you can confirm your business and set up your Google+ page to help you manage your Business listing.

It's as simple as that!

Common Problems

You might find that your business is not appearing in the search results. This can down to 1 of 2 reasons. The first being that you may have fallen foul of Googles guidelines for its business listings. Make sure you read through these before you start creating your listing to help ensure it is approved. The second reason may be that Google Business Listings are no longer a will kept secret and you're likely to face fierce competition from similar companies in your area fighting for the higher results pages. There are however a few things you can do to improve your chances:

- The more up-to-date and detailed your listing is, the likelihood is that you will rank higher, so things like adding photos to your listing, regularly updating any changes to your opening hours and replying to reviews are vital.
- Make sure that you're consistent with your company name, address and telephone number across all online media as well as local directories you may be listed in.



4. Getting Reviews

Now that you've set up your Google My Business page and followed all the steps to optimise it, it's time to start getting customer reviews for your products and/or services and consider the impact they will have on your business and search ranking.

Implement a Review Acquisition Strategy

Developing a strategy will require you to get creative. Different strategies work well for different businesses and while it would be impossible for us to cover every scenario, there are a few things that you should **never** do to acquire reviews:

- Don't pay for reviews – and don't pay marketers who pay for reviews either.
- Don't pay anyone to post reviews (genuine or not) – Consumers should always post their own reviews directly on all third-party platforms and neither you, nor your marketers should have influence on what they post about you.
- Don't review your own business and don't prompt your staff to do so either.
- Don't set up a location in your place of business to ask for reviews. If an IP address is being shared among many reviews on any one platform, this might lead to those reviews being flagged. Even wi-fi can cause review filtering, but there's not much you can do to stop customers who review you in this way, especially if you offer free wi-fi.
- Don't negatively review your competitors – it's against the rules of most review platforms and let's face it, just plain unsporting.
- Always respond in a way that will assure future consumers of your professionalism.

- Don't ignore the rules of review platforms. Neglecting to play by their rules can lead to review removals, messages on your public profile that publicly shame you and in some cases, can lead to litigation.
- Don't neglect your website! This is your most important tool in your marketing arsenal and it's extremely important to use it as a platform for displaying honest reviews and testimonials.

Once you've become a master at avoiding these pitfalls, you can start experimenting with a variety of techniques for encouraging consumers to review your business.

Make Your Company Complaint Friendly

A complaint can easily turn into a negative review. If you catch it before this happens, you'll save both your customer and your company time and effort. There are steps you can take to make sure you're resolving as many issues as possible with your customers:

- Let your customers know that if something is unsatisfactory, to let you know.
- Put a mobile-friendly complaint form on your website.
- Regularly check social media discussions regarding your brand and jump in with offers to make things better for consumers who are expressing a negative sentiment.
- Make sure that any staff dealing with customers make a point of making sure that everything is to their satisfaction.
- Don't underestimate the value that complaints offer. Complaints can offer a plethora of inspiration for improving aspects of your business that aren't satisfying your customers.

There are some marketers have estimated that it can cost nearly 25 times as much to win a new customer than it would to keep an existing one happy. And a recent survey that discovered that only 13% of consumers are happy to do business with a company that has a 1-2-star rating. It's important to understand that businesses should strive to resolve complaints quickly and efficiently before they escalate into negative reviews.

Claim Your Profile on Major Platforms

There are many platforms that allow owner responses. This provide a great opportunity to contribute to the online conversation that surrounds your brand. You can thank customers who leave positive reviews and engage customers who have left negative ones to try and win them back.

To participate, you need to claim your business profile on the various websites and platforms your customers are using. Simply search for your business in Google adding the word “reviews” and compile a list of those websites that rank highly for your brand. If you’re a brand-new business, see where your competitors are being discussed. Chances are that those sites will be important for your business too.

A Google My Business listing is now an essential for local SEO. It's free to set up and one of the best actions you can take in improving your local SEO visibility. Consumers are 38% more likely to visit and 29% more likely to consider buying from your business when you have a complete Google My Business page.

The Negative Review

As a business owner, you will encounter a negative review or two at some point. The trick is to remain calm and have a strategy. While a bad review is not the end of the world, it is the last chance that the business will likely have to make amends and win back the customer.

The most important thing is to not respond in unprofessionally. Regardless of who is to blame, it’s up to you to use every skill you possess to apologize and make amends. You might not only win back that customer, but other future potential customers who read the review gain a favourable impression of how the company treats its patrons.

The next step should be to carefully craft a response. There are a few tips to bear in mind. Firstly, don't blame the customer or accuse them of lying or exaggerating. Also, don't refuse to apologise or use unprofessional language.

The first thing that you should do is apologise and accept complete responsibility as the owner of the business. Acknowledging that the customer is unhappy and has not had a favourable experience can go a long way to restoring the relationship with them.

The next step is to express your commitment to making amends if the customer gives you the opportunity (A refund, a meal on the house, a replacement product etc). You should show a commitment to fixing the issues that they have raised and explain what action you will take/have taken to do so.

Most importantly, keep it brief and sincere. You might be surprised to see how often an empathetic and generous business owner’s response will prompt a customer to amend their review reflecting their new impression of the care they receive.

Express gratitude to your positive reviews too. Being proactive in building a sense of engagement with your customers can go a long way in increasing brand loyalty.

How can Air help with your Local SEO?

All the processes we use have evolved in line with Google's to ensure that you stay penalty free and squeaky clean.

We strategise and research our client's market and current search engine rankings before we provide our recommendation, so we need to know what makes you tick as a company first. We take the time to research and analyse your market sector. Our insights will show where the best results will come from.

Our enterprise-level analytics and reporting keep the strategy fluid, focussing on more of what works and improving what doesn't to keep the results coming.

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