



LOCAL SEO

Cheat Sheet

 CLICKCONSULT[®]

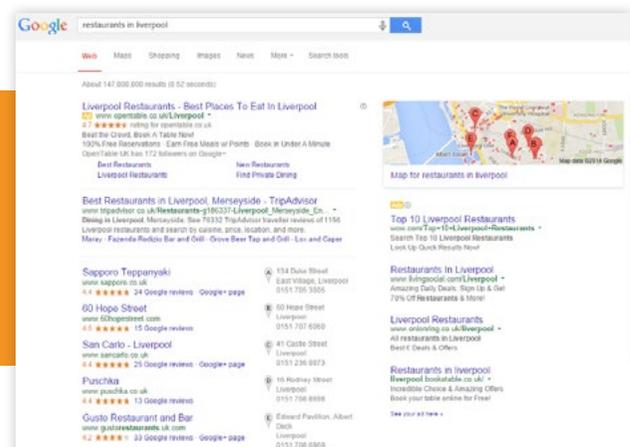
What is local SEO?

As a result of the rapid growth of mobile, local SEO has grown significantly in recent years with businesses aiming to take advantage of the improved connectivity of consumers whilst on the go.

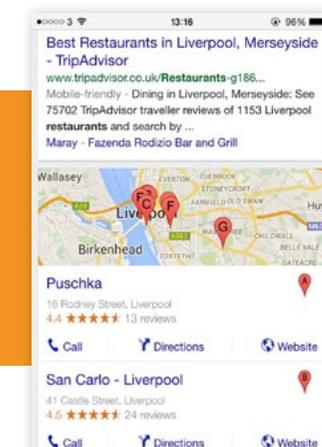
Any business with a physical address that gets customers from a local area, should consider incorporating local SEO into its search marketing strategy. The aim of this concept is to increase the chance of an appearance on page one of search engines in either the conventional organic results or within the local specific sub-section (usually appearing below the opening conventional organic listing).

Local SEO can be defined as:

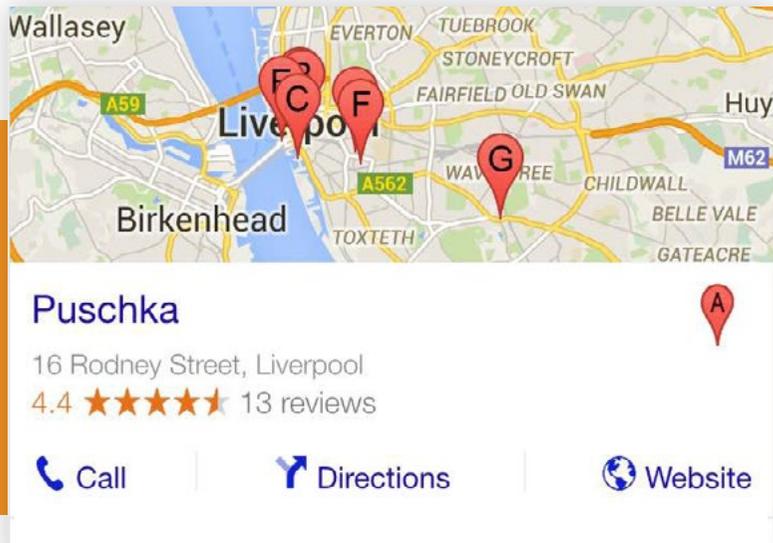
OPTIMISING THE VISIBILITY OF
A WEBSITE ACROSS MAJOR
SEARCH ENGINES FOR LOCAL
SPECIFIC SEARCHES



An example of local SEO can be seen in the results given for the search term “restaurants in Liverpool”.



An example based on the search query “restaurants” highlights the localised results provided on a mobile device.



Local based listings generally feature:

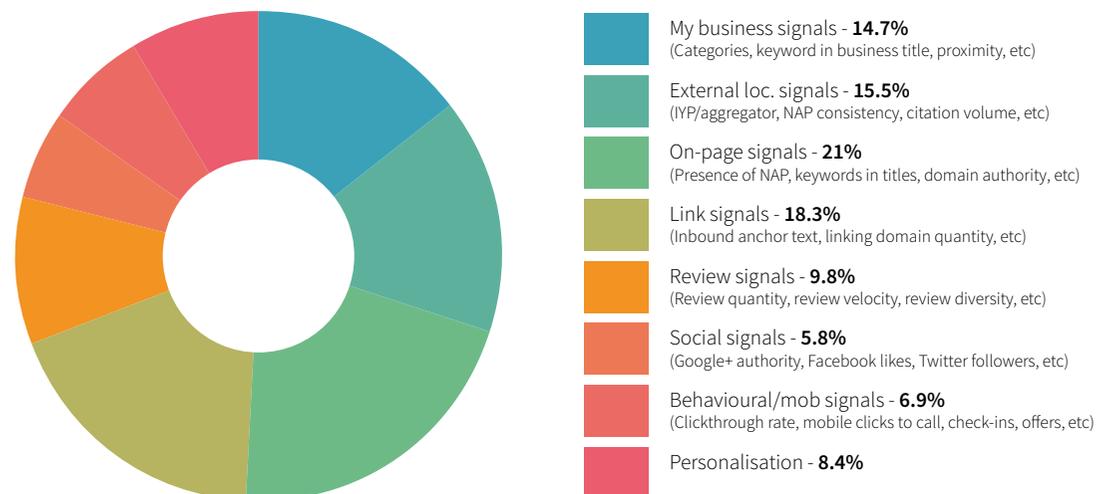
- A link to the company website
- Business address
- Reviews
- The location of the business is also highlighted on a Google Map

Additionally, an added benefit of well executed local SEO practice is the appearance of localised results within conventional organic listings. For generic phrases such as ‘plumbers’ the results given contain a mixture of both national organisations and local businesses. This is therefore a major advantage for local businesses that historically may not have appeared for search terms such as this.

To perform well in local SEO, you must adhere to traditional SEO rankings factors as per any standard campaign, however there a number of unique components that are aligned and weighted towards local SEO.

These components, sorted by influence, have been presented in the results of a recent survey undertaken by Moz that asked industry experts what they believed are the main ranking factors in local results:

Local SEO ranking factors



Optimising for local SEO

When looking to develop a local SEO strategy, there are a number of key areas that you must focus on and optimise accordingly:



Google + and local business profile



On-site optimisation and semantic markup



Citations and reviews



Mobile-centric content





Google + and local business profile page

The creation of a local business profile on Google is a vital element when looking to master local SEO. If you haven't already got one, this should be the first stage in the development of your local search strategy. The information that is provided on a local profile will be displayed in localised search results both on desktop and mobile devices. Generally, localised results will display reviews, the business address and telephone number.

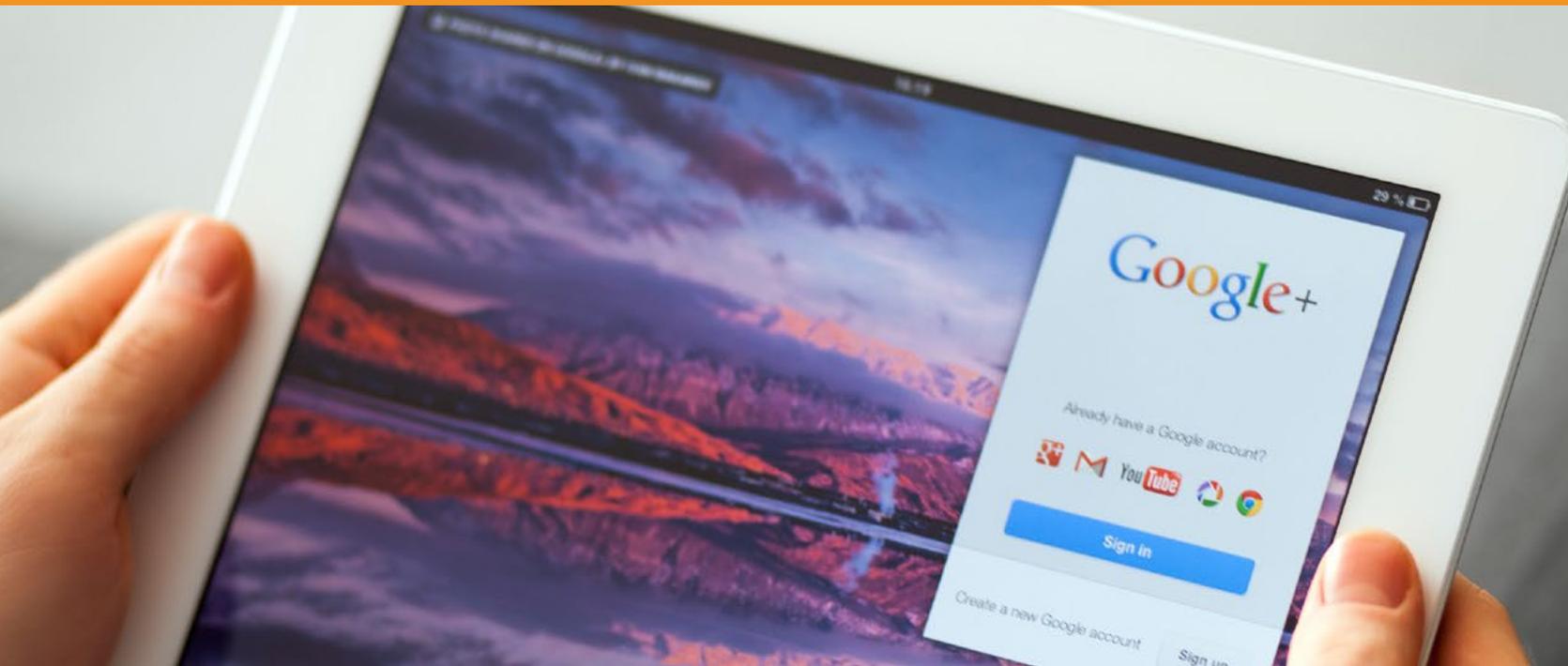
There are a number of steps that you will need to take in order to effectively set up your local business page on Google.



1. Firstly, create a Google account. In order to make your business listing appear authentic to Google, it is best practice to register the account using an email address that is directly associated to the domain name
2. You will then be given two options that best categorises your business:
 - *Storefront business – this option is to be chosen if you serve customers at your physical business location, i.e. restaurant, hotel, shop*
 - *Service area business – this option is for businesses that serve a local area, i.e. plumbers, taxi services*
3. After selecting your business category, you will be prompted to enter the name or address of your business into the search bar. Select your business in the provided results or if your company doesn't appear, click "No, these are not my business" and provide detailed information regarding your business
4. After submitting your business information, you will need to verify this. Google provides you with two ways to do this, either by postcard or telephone
5. When your account is verified, you will then be able to edit your profile. It is at this stage that you must ensure that your profile is 100% completed

In order to maximise your local search visibility, there are 5 core areas that you must ensure are correctly set up on your local business profile:

- Enter the details of your business accurately. Check that your business name, address and telephone number (NAP) is identical to how it is provided on your website
- Make sure that your page links back to the location specific page on your website. In instances when multiple locations are covered, it is best practice to use a landing page for each specific location and in turn create a separate local business profile for each location
- Choose a category that best describes your business. Ensure that you choose a default category, however multiple categories can be chosen if this helps to describe your business
- Create a unique business description that summarises the business offering, 250 words in length including a few keyword mentions
- Add media to provide customers with a valuable experience





On-site optimisation and semantic markup

In light of Google's Pigeon update in July 2014, that focused on aligning localised results with the core algorithm, it is now even more critical to ensure that your website is fully optimised for local SEO in order to gain a greater localised presence in search engine results pages.

Name, address and phone number (NAP)

Ensure that the NAP on your website is identical to how it is shown on your local business profile page. It is critical to ensure that Google categorises you as the same organisation. This is the case for both single and multiple location pages and the information can be shown anywhere on the page, but the footer is most common for single location businesses.

If for any reason your information such as your phone number or email address is shown as an image, ensure that they have a corresponding alt tag with the information being shown in either text or number format and have the phone number displayed elsewhere on the page.

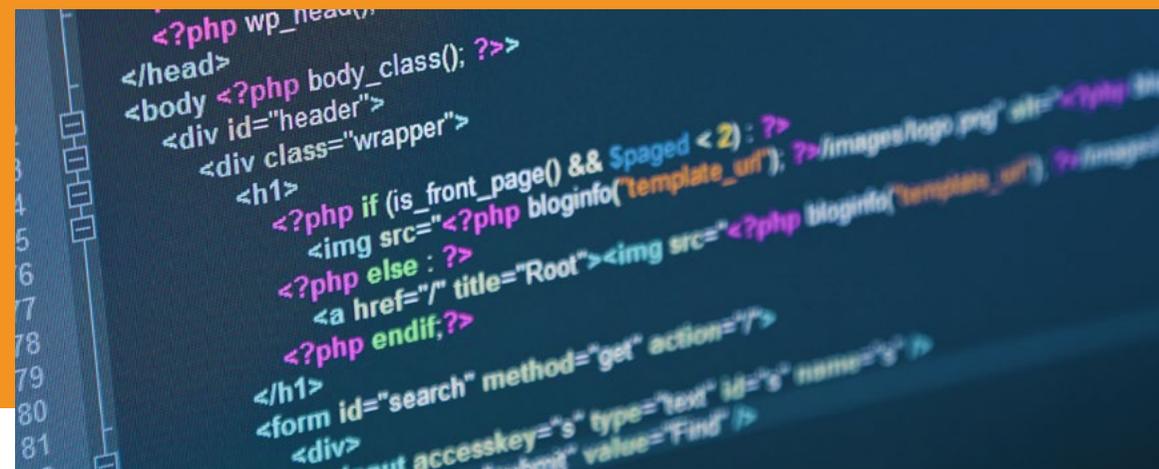
Keyword optimisation

As in the case of conventional SEO, it is important to optimise your landing pages for local terms. You need to ensure that your business name, targeted local keywords and the business location are included on all landing pages in all of the significant on-page locations.

This means that each element should be included in:

- Meta title
- Meta description
- Opening H1
- Image alt tags
- On-page copy

However, similarly to the case of standard SEO, these pages must be optimised naturally and keyword stuffing should be avoided.



On-page content

An important aspect of local SEO is ensuring that the copy across your website is high quality and extensive. In the case of local SEO, this must be the case on all local pages on your website.

Location specific landing pages should ideally be 300 words in length and include information about the local area. If you have multiple local pages on your website, you have to ensure that each page has unique content.

Embed a Google map

Each location landing page should have an embedded Google Map based on the business address. Embedded maps can be easily re-sized to fit around copy on the page and not only does this provide good user experience, it also provides Google with vital local based information about your organisation. When setting up this feature, make sure that your address matches that of your Google local listing.

Semantic markup

When optimising your website for local SEO, it has become critical to optimise your website with semantic markup. For local businesses, the markup of important information such as the business address, telephone number, opening hours and map data is important as it allows Google to understand the context of the information shown on the page.

An example of local schema markup (schema.org/LocalBusiness) can be seen to the right:

```
<div itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/LocalBusiness">  
<a itemprop="url" href="http://www.examplebusiness.com">  
<div itemprop="name"><strong>Example business name</strong></div>  
</a>  
<div itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/Organization">  
<span itemprop="telephone">(020) 7569-0000</span>  
</div>  
<div itemprop="address" itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/PostalAddress">  
<span itemprop="streetAddress">159 Example Lane</span><br>  
<span itemprop="addressLocality">Victoria </span>  
<span itemprop="addressRegion">London </span>  
<span itemprop="postalCode">SW1V 1AG</span><br>  
<span itemprop="addressCountry">UK</span><br>  
</div>  
</div>
```

Source:

<http://www.smartinsights.com/search-engine-optimisation-seo/blended-or-universal-search/semantics-markup-future-seo/>



Reviews, citations, link building and social media

Industry experts believe that citations, reviews and having the correct profile listings are the biggest contributing factors to local search based rankings. The basis of many local SEO campaigns therefore focuses on the building and development of both citations and reviews.

Citations

NAP citations are a significant ranking factor in local SEO and these are viewed much like standard backlinks in traditional SEO. These are examples of other websites mentioning a business, containing key business information such as the name, address and phone number. These citations are a clear indication that the company is an established local business, however much like in traditional link building, the quality and authority of third-party websites plays a big role in their impact. High quality directories are a good place to start when developing citations, websites such as Yell, Thomson and Yelp are all good examples. When creating these listings, it is imperative that the contact information remains consistent as per your local profile.

Reviews

For any business, having a first-class reputation is crucial for generating interest around your brand and for retaining customers. In the world of local SEO, reputation is also extremely critical, as experts now believe that reviews are the most influential factor in achieving local search rankings.

Reviews given on a Google local business profile have the most influence, however third-party website reviews are also taken into consideration. In recent times, Google just used the amount of reviews in place as the main influence, although it is now believed that Google looks in greater detail, such as looking at the person who left the review (in terms of whether they hold any authority) and the sentiment of the post given.

In addition to the impact on your local SEO position, Google reviews will also result in the appearance of stars next to your local listing. These will help your business stand out from the crowd, with recent research suggesting an increase in over 2.5% in clicks for listings where star ratings appear.

Therefore with this in mind, a crucial part of any local SEO campaign is to actively encourage reviews from your customers. There are a number of ways you can do this including; asking customers directly, via email marketing or by having a link on your website prompting customers to leave a review. However, under no circumstances must fake reviews be used as this will in turn have a negative impact on your search visibility.

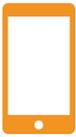
Link building

Although there are a number of other factors involved, traditional link building is still a major ranking factor within local SEO. Therefore, generating backlinks from established and authoritative local websites will have an impact on your local search success. You should make sure that some of your linking profile contains anchor text mentioning both your brand name and the location of your business. These links also should ideally point to the location specific landing pages of your website. Some examples of potential linking opportunities could include local news and tourism websites or perhaps local businesses that may be associated to your organisation.

Social media

The impact of social sharing is relatively low, but in the world of search it has long been felt that social media has an impact on SEO performance and is more the case when it comes to local SEO. Therefore the development of an active social media strategy should be created in line with your local SEO activity in order to provide a multi-channel approach.





Mobile-centric content

All of this hard work means nothing if you don't have a website which works well on mobile devices. This will not only result in high bounce rates, but could also impact on your local ranking positions as Google is now increasingly taking mobile friendliness into account when deciding rankings.

This is shown by the recent development of Google warning users in mobile search engine results about websites which will not provide mobile visitors with a good user experience. You therefore need to make sure that your website is ready for mobile visitors. You could choose to create a responsive design for your website, where the layout will adjust to accommodate different user devices. This is a strategy employed by Google on their own websites.

A similar strategy to this is to dynamically serve different versions of your website depending on the user agent requesting the page. This will display a different page without affecting the URL.

Alternatively, you could launch a parallel mobile website where mobile visitors are automatically redirected to an alternative URL which better accommodates mobile devices.

Regardless of your strategy, make sure that your website is mobile ready and remember that simply creating a website and making it mobile friendly as an afterthought is not the correct strategy. Write your content with mobile users in mind and also consider them when designing both your website aesthetics and user journey.

