

Steps to Internet Local Search Success

More shoppers and potential clients are using Internet search engines like Google, Yahoo and Bing to find local businesses on the World Wide Web before making contact by phone or in person. With most of the new mobile communication devices now Internet ready, it is even more important to be visible online. If you provide a service or product locally, put local search high on your marketing to-do list.

According to ComScore data, between 30-40% of the over 14 billion monthly searches in the United States involve geographic limitations or local intent (for example, searching for "car wash" or "barber shop"). Search engines have become the primary source for local business information, ranking higher than either printed directories or websites that focus on localized listings.

In addition to maintaining a professional website, local search is an effective and low-cost way to build your business through increased traffic on your website and through your front door. Below are several basic steps that you should follow to ensure that your business is fully and accurately represented in local search engine results and online directory listings:

- **Register with the primary local and social search engines.** Google, Yahoo, Microsoft, AOL, Ask, Local.com, and TrueLocal all have free registration to help build their business directories. Make sure you are listed and include your website address. Also sign-up with sites building directories with user generated reviews, such as CitySearch, Insider Pages, and Craig's List.
- **Update your free listings in online business directories and Internet Yellow Pages.** Find and update your business profiles at Amacai, infoUSA, and Acxiom websites. These companies provide most of the listing information for smaller search directories. Also, update or create your business listing at YellowPages.com, SuperPages.com and SwitchBoard.com.
- **Optimize your website for local search.** Use local geographic terms in your page titles and webpage content. Place a map on your site and be sure to feature your address and contact information on every webpage and in the footer. You can report local news, feature hometowns in staff bios, or talk about local communities in a company history.
- **Use a directory submission service to increase the accuracy and visibility of your listings.** You can save time by using a reliable business listing submission service where you create one profile and pay for submissions to other directories, search engines, portals and guides (AOL, CitySearch). Companies such as UniversalBusinessListing.org offer a comprehensive submission service for an annual flat fee (\$30) while others charge by the number of manual submissions.

To lay the foundation for other forms of online marketing (search engine optimization or advertising), business owners first need to fully develop their company websites and take steps to ensure that public online information about their business is accurate, complete, and accessible through local search providers.

The Brazosport College Small Business Development Center can help you build a free website hosted by Microsoft OfficeLive and offers frequent workshops to guide you through this process. Call 979-230-3380 for more information or visit www.brazosport.edu/sbdc/training.

Janice Goines, PhD, is Director of the Brazosport College Small Business Development Center. The Brazosport College SBDC is a business consulting and training center of the University of Houston SBDC Network. The UH SBDC Network serves 32 counties in Southeast Texas and is a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration. Funding is in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration. All opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SBA. SBDC programs are non-discriminatory and available to individuals with disabilities. Brazosport College is an EEO/AA institution. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities will be made if requested at least 2 weeks in advance. Contact Brazosport College SBDC at 979/230-3380 for accommodations. Please call (979) 230-3380 or email Janice.Goines@brazosport.edu if you have questions or comments.