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Guide: How to structure a local SEO strategy for your business

30-second summary:

- Take advantage of Google’s search market domination with two spots on the first page of Google – Local pack and

localized organic search results.
- Optimize for high converting local keywords, establish a local content schedule, and more.
- Founder of Digital Ducats Inc. shares a thorough guide on everything you need for a successful local SEO strategy.

For many companies, an effective SEO strategy for local business is the key factor for increasing revenue from high converting traffic. Local SEO can mean the difference in outranking authority websites for vital keywords within your city.

Along with the overall benefits of SEO, optimizing to compete *locally* improves your search visibility for keyword searches made from your location.

Many aspects of local SEO have remained the same over the last few years however, the weight of local ranking factors has shifted creating new priorities for local businesses.

One aspect that remains the prime focus for every local business is the significance of Google My Business.

1. Gain instant visibility with GMB

Google My Business has been instrumental in driving customers to a local business. Considering the search engine market share that Google holds, you're literally losing money by not having a GMB listing.

As of June 2020, Google tops the charts for search engine market share boasting 86% of desktop and 95% of total mobile searches.

It should be clear that failing to prioritize your presence in GMB can cost your company thousands of dollars.

One of the many advantages that Google My Busines allows is instant search visibility for a business operating in a locality. Rather than going through the process of ranking your own domain, your website receives instant search visibility from local searches within close proximity.

The Possum update made proximity a primary ranking factor for achieving a top position in the Local Pack. Your company can appear on the first page of results based on the distance between your location and the location of a user.

In 2020, according to the State Of Local SEO Industry Report, proximity has fallen to the third most influential ranking factor behind on-page optimization and reviews. The general consensus among those surveyed is that optimizing your listing is the top priority for ranking in the Local Pack.

2. Optimize your GMB profile

Optimize your GMB listing just as you would your website in terms of providing as much information to search engines as possible. The more detail you can provide in your profile, the more information search engines have to reference your business for keyword related searches.

NAP details

Fill in every option available to maximize your opportunities

to appear in the Local Pack. Name, address, and phone number (NAP details) are extremely important to have spelled correctly.

Obviously, this is important for users to receive the correct information. Search engines will also verify your business details with third party citations.

Explore all category options

One of the biggest mistakes small business owners make is failing to include the correct categories. There has been a countless number of clients that have been able to rank in the Local Pack by simply adding the correct category for their business.

Google updates the list of eligible categories your business can fall under. It’s advisable to check periodically for new categories that would enhance the accuracy of your listing.

One way to explore any options you may have missed is to search Google for the local keywords you’re targeting. Check the Local Finder for the categories that your competition is using to rank in the top positions.

Keyword optimization

It should be noted that on-page optimization is proving to be the strongest ranking factor for ranking in the Local Pack. This can be a source of frustration for those who operate under Google guidelines since Google has allowed keyword stuffing to trump other ranking factors.

If you’re adhering to Google’s guidelines, the name of your business should be the only thing in your GMB listing. What should be happening and what is actually working are two different things that have created somewhat of a loophole and a grey area for SEO.

The fact is that using the keyword in the name of your business will get you results. It’s as simple as that.

If you’re starting a business that operates in a specific city it’s highly effective to incorporate your main keyword in the name of your business. It’s been so effective that it’s led to keyword stuffing-which, in theory, should be penalized-but seems to be left unregulated.

Here is an example of successful keyword manipulation for the phrase “bespoke suits Toronto”. Each of these sites outranks other sites based on the name used in the GMB profile.

It’s hard to say what will prevail in the long run because the evidence points to the fact that this is working to rank

sites. After monitoring this listing for over 6 months, it continues to rank and undoubtedly reaps the benefits of local traffic from a prime placement in the local pack.

3. Build your local presence with citations

Structured citations an essential element in local SEO despite the reduced effectiveness they once had as a ranking factor. Their purpose serves two functions; to validate your business information for search engines; to provide additional targeted traffic.

List your business in well-known directories

List your business in the largest and most relevant directories for your city or region to get the most coverage from relevant citations. Some of the most obvious are Bing and Yahoo since they both have local business listings.

Major directories will typically serve as a source of information for much smaller, but relevant websites. Your business information is essentially distributed to dozens of other directories that will help to establish the validity and credibility of your business.

The major directories from each country and region can vary so it’s important to establish which sites will have the most impact with the least effort.

In Canada, posting your business on Yellow Pages results in a wide distribution of sites that are relevant to Canada. Moz provides an excellent visual as an example of the distribution network Yellow Pages provides.

Source: Moz

Here’s an example of the U.S. local ecosystem provided by Moz (keep in mind these images are now a few years old). According to this illustration below, there are many major directories that can have a large impact on your search visibility in the U.S.

Search for niche and local directories

Enhance the profile of your citations and improve your sources of traffic by searching for directories that are niche-specific and location-specific.

Getting a few links from directories that are in your niche and location will improve the relevance of your site in both areas. Look for relevant directories by using the following in a search:

[Your niche] + directories

[Your location] + directories

Qualify each directory

Make sure the sites you choose to place your business have a decent amount of traffic and authority. Even if a directory is unique in your city, if it has a high spam score

(use Mozbar to filter these sites), or has extremely low domain authority it may do more harm than good.

SEMRush is also a good tool to use for a quick reference on the amount of traffic a website receives. If the organic search traffic is a bust, don’t list your company website on it.

You don’t need a lot of these sites to complete an effective citation profile. Google won’t give a whole lot of credit for acquiring easy links. The goal of this endeavor is to create significant ties to your city and industry and position your company on sites that get relevant traffic.

4. Establish your content strategy

Your website is only as good as the content you publish. Create content to serve as a resource for clients. Educational content produces three times as many leads as paid ads. Keep in mind you will need to publish both educational content as well as local SEO content for more localized search result

appearances.

The initial stages of your content strategy should be to create the most important pages with local service areas in mind. Is your business focused on one location only, or will you service multiple areas? This determines whether you will be publishing location pages for multiple cities or have a central location.

Single location businesses

If your business is focused on one location, you can incorporate geo-modifiers in your URLs and titles. Optimize your service/product pages to appear in city-specific searches using your location as part of your keywords.

Businesses with multiple service areas

For multiple service areas, you will need to publish location pages to target the areas you want your business to appear for in city-specific searches. Location pages should have unique content for each city and include the NAP details of each location.

Publish content for each level of the marketing funnel

The most important pages of your site are the bottom of the funnel pages that urge visitors to make a purchase. Focus your initial content strategy on publishing mid-funnel content that targets long-tail keywords.

The sweet spot for identifying target keywords is low competition, high volume keywords. What determines “high volume” can vary depending on the industry. Aim to beat your competition with long-tail keywords that convert at a higher rate.

Publish local content

Your local SEO content strategy can include a variety of options to increase the relevance to your location. Your content can include city-specific events that you're company is involved in, or events that are related to your industry.

Your local content strategy should include regular posts on Google My Business. Approximately 17% of businesses post to GMB on a weekly basis. Create a competitive advantage by sticking to a bi-weekly posting schedule.

The posts don't need to be extensive, persuasive essays to get the job done. They can even be excerpts from blog posts to lead users to the actual article on your site. Posting to GMB creates more entry poPosting images can attract a lot of search views and get people to your site as well. Images of products or finished projects will grab the attention of users to help drive more traffic to your site.ints to your website and promotes more user engagement through your business's knowledge card.

GMB has a category to post special offers, updates, and important information about your company. Capitalize on the areas that other companies are not doing well by including GMB posts in your local content strategy.

Posting images can attract a lot of search views and get people to your site as well. Images of products or finished projects will grab the attention of users to help drive more traffic to your site.

5. Local link building

The majority of local businesses have a backlink profile that is primarily made up of directory links and profile links. An effective link building strategy for a local business is one that appears natural and above all, demonstrates evidence of relevance to your industry and city.

Build domain authority with linkable assets

The blog of every local business can be used to build authority in your industry. Publish linkable assets and

insightful resources for both clients and amplifiers.

Amplifiers, as explained by Rand Fishkin, have a significant impact on the backlinks you acquire since they are the people most likely to link to your site. Creating content for amplifiers gives your site more reasons to acquire links and increase the domain authority of your site.

Linkable, shareable content makes link building much easier. You can publish guest posts, submit press releases, and reach out to authority sites in your niche to link to the inner pages of your website to increase domain authority.

Increase local ranking power with local links

Local links are considered the most powerful when it comes to localized search results as well as appearing in the Local Pack. Local links are also considered unstructured citations. Local links can come from local businesses, local newspapers, local chambers of commerce, and local event sites.

Form a local business alliance

Finding businesses within your industry is ideal for creating a local alliance and boosting your ranking ability. For example, if you're a hot tub retailer some of your best links would come from local businesses that sell swimming pools.

As long as you don't compete for the same products, a local business in your industry or a close vertical is the most ideal source of links.

Resource link building targeting vendors and client sites

You can improve the likelihood of obtaining local links by using your own network of resources. Companies you already do business with make for ideal link prospects.

For example, a restaurant can ask the baker who supplies their bread rolls to link from their site.

A plumber can ask his equipment suppliers and vice versa.

Ideally, you want to target business owners with whom you already have an existing relationship.

6. Review management

The reviews your business receives have the power to influence a user's decision on whether or not to choose your company.

Review management remains a top priority for local businesses to improve search visibility and maintain a good reputation.

A review strategy should include a way to get more Google reviews as well as reviews on review sites that get search visibility for related keywords. If customers are reviewing your business on sites that are niche-specific it will impact search visibility as well as promote positive ranking signals.

Identify the most important review sites in your industry

There is a major review site for every industry. It’s important to identify what review sites get a lot of traffic and reviews to position your site to receive quality prospective clients.

For example, people use Yelp or Trip Advisor to find a good restaurant in a city they’re no familiar with. People read the reviews and experiences of previous customers before making a final decision.

If you’re in the home goods business Homestars would be important sites to ask a few clients to write you a review. Here’s a 10/10 review left for Canadian Home Leisure, a hot tub retailer in Whitby, ON.

Look at the domain metrics for a site like Homestars. Not only can you get a quality backlink, but there is a ton of traffic that goes through their site.

If you’re not sure which review sites play an impact on search visibility, search for:

best + [your keyword] + [your city]

The intent of most searches that use *best* at the start indicates that users are looking for options, which trigger the major reviews and directory sites in your niche. Here’s a search for best suits in Toronto:

Each of these sites could be an additional way for customers to find you. Yelp looks like it’s the only review site that you can manage for free.

In fact, Yelp ranks #3 and #4. If you’re in the business of

selling suits in Toronto, Yelp is definitely a site to put effort into building a detailed profile and customer reviews.

In many cases, keywords that you're targeting will display a few directory and review sites in the search result. These are indications that those sites are not only relevant to enhance your optimization, but they will drive traffic to your site as well.

Establish your review acquisition strategy

This doesn't need to be a major operation but you should have

a plan in place that consistently gets you reviews. Avoid mass emails or anything that would look spammy such as a review station at your location. Too many reviews from the same IP could cause red flags and result in your reviews being ignored and discounted.

You can influence five-star reviews on the major review sites for your business by asking customers that you're sure has had a good experience with your company. You can do this in a few ways:

- Train employees to ask for a review after the completion of a sale.
- Email satisfied customers thanking them for their business with links to a few different review sites.
- Hand out instructions on how to review your business along with a receipt.

Respond to as many reviews as possible

Make it a point to respond to both negative and positive reviews. Approach each response as a form of advertising for your company and a chance to showcase your customer service.

Customers will appreciate a thank you when they've taken the time to give you a good review.

Negative reviews demand immediate responses in order to neutralize the damage that is being done to your reputation. Show every reader how you deal with a disgruntled customer by offering to fix the problem.

People will understand when mistakes are made and offering a free service, free product or free meal can be the best form of advertising for your company.

A local SEO strategy is worth the investment

Small businesses can’t afford to miss out on the opportunities that a local SEO strategy has to offer. Following these guidelines and best practices, you can outrank authority sites (who aren’t local) and capitalize on high converting traffic.

As competition intensifies so does the need to specialize in your area of expertise. Use your location to leverage more opportunities and promote long-term growth in your industry.

Christian Carere is an SEO consultant in Toronto and the founder of Digital Ducats Inc. specializing in traffic and lead generation. He can be found on Twitter @digitalducats.

More about:

https://www.searchenginewatch.com/2020/08/06/guide-how-to-structure-a-local-seo-strategy-for-your-business/

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Foolproof guide to optimizing Shopify for SEO

30-second summary:

- Search engine rankings play a huge role in making your online store more visible to shoppers. If you rank higher on the SERPs, there's a higher chance that you'll rake in more sales.
- Shopify is one of the most recommended ecommerce platforms. Data from BuiltWith shows that usage of the CMS platform has doubled since 2017, and it currently has more than one million active websites.
- It offers a great backend administration that can be tailored. More important, it's packed with SEO-friendly features right out of the box.
- Growth Rocket's Lead Outreach Specialist, Stefanie Slclot, walks you through some key steps on how to master SEO for Shopify.

"If you build it, they will come".

This nugget of wisdom may have worked for Kevin Costner's character in 'Field of Dreams' when he's spurned onward by a disembodied voice to pursue his dream of building a baseball field.

But in reality, this sort of advice can prove disastrous for entrepreneurs. After all, businesses rely on strategy, planning, and development for long-term success.

In today's day and age where online shopping is the new normal, it takes more than just building a great store to draw in more customers.

Search engine rankings play a huge role in making your online

store more visible to shoppers. If you rank higher on the SERPs, there’s a higher chance that you’ll rake in more sales.

Does Shopify have good SEO?

Shopify is one of the most recommended ecommerce platforms. Data from BuiltWith shows that usage of the CMS platform has doubled since 2017, and it currently has more than one million active websites.

Shopify is a great option for your online store because it offers easy backend administration and can be easily tailored to your specific requirements. More importantly, it’s packed with SEO-friendly features right out of the box.

Optimizing your Shopify store for success

Keep in mind that boosting organic traffic to your online store is different from optimizing other websites for SEO. In this guide, we’ll walk you through some key steps on how to master SEO for Shopify.

1. Simplify site structure

The way you organize content on your page is crucial to SEO success.

If shoppers can quickly find what they’re looking for on your site, they tend to spend more time on your page. Longer dwell times tell Google that your site offers value, which can give you a solid rankings boost.

To top that off, a logically structured site makes it easier for Google to crawl your website. Ideally, your site architecture should look something like this:

If you look at the diagram closely, you'll see that your product pages (third row) are only a couple of clicks away from the home page (first row). In turn, organized and user-friendly web design makes it easy for visitors to find what they're looking for.

Poor site structure, on the other hand, makes it harder for search engine spiders to find and index all the pages on your site.

Meanwhile, if your site architecture is interlinked, spiders can easily follow your links. A simple site architecture also means that link authority flows a lot easier from pages with more backlinks (your home page) to lower-ranking pages (product pages).

The graphic below shows what the site structure for a baking

blog should look like:

2. Eliminate duplicate content

Duplicate content happens when similar content exists on two separate URLs. The page could either be on your site or someone else’s.

Duplicate content on Shopify can have a negative impact on your search performance. Search engines tend to be tolerant of internal site duplication. But if it appears as if you’ve copied text from another site, you could get hit by a search engine penalty.

The good news is that once you’ve wiped your site clean of duplicate content, you can improve your search rankings significantly.

Consider using tools like Copyscape to check for plagiarism and other external duplicate content. You can also conduct site audits to identify pages with similar content to other URLs.

Or maybe your site is due for a redesign or content update. Break free from duplicate content by writing a new copy.

3. Conduct keyword research

Keyword research is the foundation of SEO success. Here are a few tips on how to generate relevant keywords for your store:

- Export your keywords from Google Ads, and optimize search terms that generate the most revenue and have the highest conversion rate.
- Use Google Search Console to identify keywords with the most impressions and clicks.
- Conduct SEO competitor analysis on tools like Ahrefs. Generate the “Content Gap” report to single out keywords your competitors are ranking for.
- Analyze buyer personas and track search forums related to your products for topic inspirations and keyword ideas.

4. Optimize product pages

Now that you have a list of keywords and a simplified site structure, you can start optimizing your pages with your chosen search terms.

Start with your top pages first, such as your home page and main product collections. The first step to optimizing them is by writing title tags and meta descriptions. Here are some general guidelines for you to follow:

- Write unique title tags and meta descriptions for each page
- Include a keyword when appropriate
- Avoid truncating descriptions and follow the prescribed character limit guidelines
- Craft copy that will entice visitors to click
- Keep your descriptions brief yet descriptive

It also pays to add alt texts to your images. Since Google Images is the second largest search engine in the world, you can drive more traffic to your site through your images.

That’s why it helps to add alt texts that describe what an image is about.

Once you’ve finished optimizing your titles, meta descriptions, and alt texts you can work on creating unique content to your product pages.

Keep in mind that your descriptions should be written from a user-focused POV. The best way to boost the relevance of your content is by discussing your product’s features and benefits.

5. Set up 301 redirect pages

301 redirects tell search engines that a page is no longer available and that it’s moved permanently to a new URL. After all, you don’t want your customers to move to your competitors after they land on a ‘404 Not Found’ page on your site.

The goal is for you to lead visitors to a new page, which you can do by creating a URL redirect through your Shopify admin portal. Follow these steps to add 301 redirects:

- Click Online Store > Navigation > URL Redirects
- Select Add URL redirect
- Type in the old URL in Redirect from and the new URL in Redirect to
- Click add

Keep in mind that before you can redirect users to the new URL, you’ll need to delete the existing webpage.

6. Boost page load speed

If your website loads slowly, it could hurt your Google rankings. That’s why you need to put forth the effort to make your site load quickly.

Check for your store’s site speed through tools like

Google’s PageSpeed Insights or GTMetrix. On Shopify, however, you have limited options when it comes to boosting site speed. Here are a few factors you can work with:

- Choose a theme from the Shopify Theme Store that loads quickly
- Compress your images before uploading them to Shopify
- Install only the apps you need so they don’t slow down site performance

7. Build high-quality backlinks

Search engines rely on link building and outreach to determine how the community at large values your site. Think of backlinks as the word-of-mouth equivalent of SEO. With better quality backlinks, you can build your credibility and boost the organic traffic your shop receives.

Below is a list of some backlinks you can obtain for your site:

- Supplier/Manufacturer links – If you sell products made or supplied by other companies, they may have a policy that lets them link to your store. Reach out in case you’re missing a backlink opportunity.
- Competitor links – Use tools such as Link Intersect from Ahrefs to find out who’s linking to your competitors. You have a high chance of obtaining a backlink for sites that already link to other people in your industry.
- Influencer voices – Get in touch with industry leaders for interviews that could help you generate better links and content.
- Brand mentions – Find out where your brand is being mentioned through websites like mention.com. It may be possible for you to earn a backlink if they choose to include a link to your site along with the mention.
- Broken links – Keep an eye out for broken links or

services similar to what you offer. When you find one, you could reach out to the site owner telling them to link to your site instead.

8. Focus on content marketing

Content is the reason why people visit your site. You may feel tempted to skimp on content marketing for your ecommerce site, but crafting content that delivers value adds to the overall user experience.

People who are ready to buy the moment they visit your shop make up only a small percentage of the marketing funnel. Publishing informational content like blog posts can help you educate people at different stages of the buyer's journey. In turn, it can also increase the chances of them buying from you in the future.

Your content is a way for people to get to know your brand without selling to them directly. With well-written content, you can rank for more keywords and earn backlinks.

Your Shopify store automatically includes a blog called "News." If you want to create a new blog, select Blog Posts > Create a new post > Create a new blog.

These steps will help you create a Shopify site experience that is also SEO-ready. Share your thoughts, tips, or queries in the comments section.

Stefanie Slclot is Lead Outreach Specialist at Growth Rocket.

More about:

https://www.searchenginewatch.com/2020/08/03/foolproof-guide-to-optimizing-shopify-for-seo/