The convergence of data quality to consumer discoverability

While technology is driving longer buying journeys for customers considering big-0ticket items such as travel, vehicles, or major appliances, at the local level it's all about efficiency. A consumer may use up to 13 different sources to find out information about a business but when it comes time to convert to an in-store visit, they turn to Google. Four in five consumers use search to find local information and when they do, 50% of mobile consumers will visit a store within a day. Customers want Google to bring back the best answer to meet their needs, and they want it *now*.

There, they'll find your location's address and directions, hours of operation, phone number, customer reviews, and more—often enough to make a decision about your business, without ever having left the search engine results page. Understanding this customer journey is mission-critical, and high-performance marketers know it; in fact, 88% think a customer journey strategy it's critical to marketing success, according to the Local Search Association. However, only 65% of these marketers said their brand has taken a customer journey approach to marketing, and 39% are not even actively mapping their customer journeys.

Where's the disconnect? In this post, I'll talk about how to identify and combat friction caused by data quality in your local customer's journey, in order to improve the experience people are having with your locations, where and whenever those interactions are happening.

1. Are your local listings helping or hindering?

Inaccurate local listings have a hugely detrimental effect on customer experience. Searchers may be met in their moments of need with the wrong store hours, for example, or directions to a store that has been closed down. Poor local listings data does even more damage to your brand's online presence by eroding the search engine's trust in the brand, as well. Google doesn't want to show searchers the incorrect answers to their query. If searchers are having negative experiences with your listings, it's a strong signal to Google that they should not recommend your locations to others.

Our data shows that just 1 in 60 local searches result in a click-through to a website. In an age where searchers find everything they need to convert in your local listings, brand marketers need to be able to manage them at scale to prevent friction and stopping points in the customer journey.

2. Brands can reduce friction in location discovery and the pathway from search to store with local pages.

Accurate, complete local listings are the solid foundation on which brands can begin to level up their customer journey enhancements. Once listings are optimized, you can focus your efforts on providing and measuring the effectiveness of value-add experiences such as BOPUS (buy online, pick up in-store), integrating local inventory levels with online search, facilitating local bookings or reservations, etc.

Mobile-responsive local pages with integrated reviews, schema, local or brand events and promotions, and other hyperlocal

content help consumers take action. They also important SEO benefits and brands increase their search visibility at the local level. A dynamic locator further reduces friction by guiding consumers to their closest location and can also help brands showcase specialty offerings, dealer locations, service areas, and more.

3. Local reviews are key for both customer experience and search visibility.

Brands need to be a part of the online conversation about their locations in order to protect and grow the business. Consumers take reviews seriously – 92% read them and 40% form an opinion by reading just one to three reviews. This is a vital part of the customer journey, where decisions are made in an instant.

In addition to their importance to consumers, local reviews are an important MapPack ranking signal that Google uses to gauge the credibility and reputation of business locations. Review data appears in local search listings for locations with five or more reviews, but can be integrated in local pages, as well. This provides the social proof consumers crave as they're deciding whether to proceed with your brand, or head back to the SERPs to keep looking. It happens that fast.

People are looking for brands to engage, too. Reviews with brand responses are up to 15 times more likely to be considered helpful, but reviews more than three months old are disregarded by 85% of consumers.

Brands with hundreds or thousands of locations need a technology-driven strategy for reviews management that enables real-time listening, alerts and response assignments, competitive benchmarking and sentiment analysis at the brand

level. This reduces friction in the customer journey and ensures that your reviews data is sending the best possible signals to Google, to boost your local search visibility for all locations.

4. Bad data cannot result in a good customer experience.

Poor quality or outdated data is a major obstacle for brands. As Forrester VP Kate Leggett said, “Garbage in/garbage out erodes customer satisfaction.” She cited the example of an international bank “that could not meet its customer satisfaction goals because agents in its 23 contact centers all followed different operational processes, using up to 18 different apps – many of which contained duplicate data – to serve a single customer.”

Data standardization is critical in marketing, where consumers are interacting with brands across devices, platforms, networks and search engines. In a previous column, I talked about the obstacles multi-location brands face in making location data actionable beyond its originally intended purpose. Enterprises typically have multiple databases containing disparate location data sets from different departments and while all of this data likely meets the individual needs of the unit it came from, it typically doesn’t meet the stringent data quality standards Google and the other search engines require.

Brands need a single source of truth for location data – one platform in which all location data is gathered, cleansed, formatted, and activated.

Clean data drives superior local search performance for all of your locations.

Solve customer pain points and remove barriers to conversion

across the brand with a proactive, holistic approach to local.

- Simplify and improve the efficacy of local listings management by using technology to push bulk updates, claim listings, resolve duplication errors, and otherwise improve/protect the validity of your local listings data at scale.
- Map out your most common customer journeys. How do searchers progress from local listings to in-store visitors? How do searchers find you if they are already familiar with the brand? How do they find you if they are not, but have an expressed need for a product or service you provide? How can you facilitate the journey for each of these different types of customers?
- What do local reviews tell customers and search engines about your business locations? Manage all reviews within a single platform for access to competitive benchmarking, alerts and assignments, local responses, and qualitative/quantitative data that can help inform brand decisions and identify both top performers and locations where opportunities exist to improve.

Data cleanliness and accuracy must be priority number one for brands looking to improve marketing performance at the local level. The impact of poor data on your local visibility and customers' journey cannot be ignored.

Opinions expressed in this article are those of the guest author and not necessarily Search Engine Land. Staff authors are listed here.

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