

10 BEST PRACTICES FOR YOUR LOCAL SEO STRATEGY IN 2019

TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR ONLINE PRESCENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Okay yeah, I know - it's not 2019 yet. BUT

Marketing is all about being ahead the curve and I wanted to get a really solid look at what all the experts are saying about the best local SEO strategies and tactics for 2019. In my research, something became really clear: local search isn't magic. It's simply about using data to understand what works and what doesn't.

So, to help with that, I've compiled these 10 best practices for local SEO in 2019. Whether you use this guide for your current local SEO strategy or use it to start from scratch, you're **guaranteed** to see results.

By the end of this guide, you'll have the methodology for launching and maintaining your own local SEO strategy.

For the quick readers, here are my 10 simple tips for dominating your local SEO strategy:

1. **Claim and Optimize Google My Business**
2. **Build Local Citations**
3. **Collect and Monitor Reviews**
4. **Add Local Schema Markup to Your Site**
5. **On-site SEO: Optimize Your Site Content for Search Engines**
6. **Off-site SEO: Build Relevant and High-Authority Links**
7. **Create a Social Media Strategy**
8. **Optimize Your Site for User Experience and Speed**
9. **Integrate Your Local SEO Strategy with Other Marketing Channels**
10. **Use Tools to Monitor and Automate**

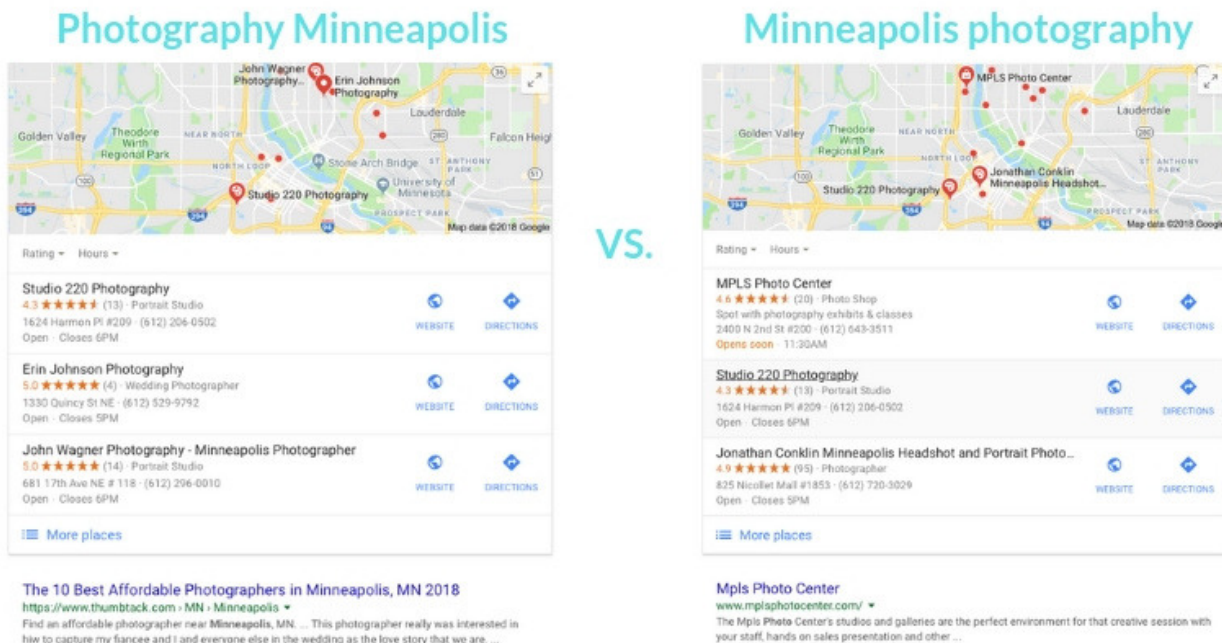
Before we dive into breaking these down, let's talk a bit about the basics of local SEO and what a local SEO strategy looks like.

What is Local SEO Marketing?

Local SEO marketing is simply the practice of optimizing the search presence for a localized business. The whole goal is to land on the first page of Google for local keywords. For example, if I'm looking for a photographer in Minneapolis, here are few keywords I might try to find one:

1. Photographers Minneapolis
2. Minneapolis photography
4. Minneapolis family photography
4. Minneapolis wedding photography
5. Best photographers in Minneapolis

If you go to Google and type these in, you'll get a different result each time. Check it out:



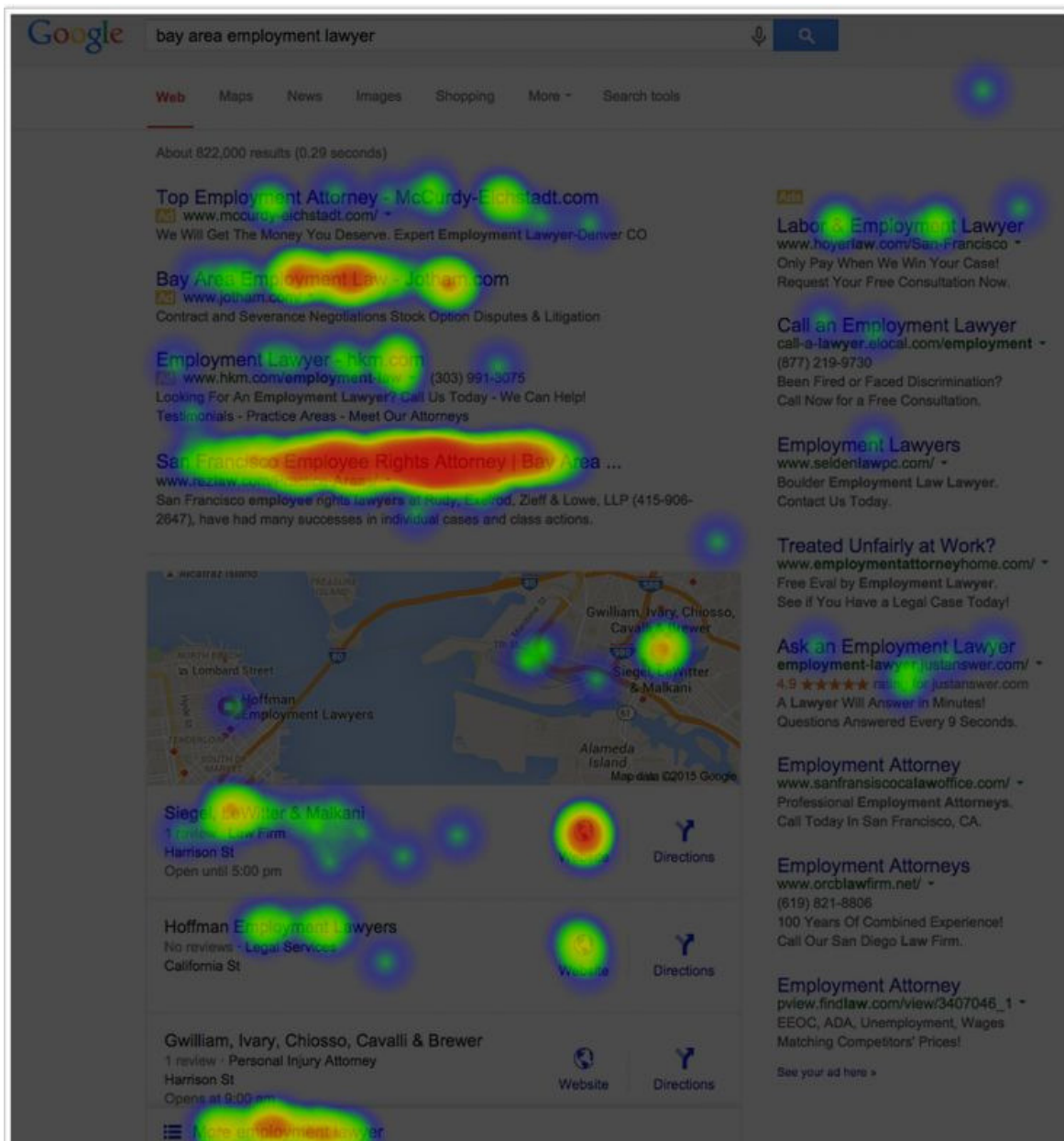
Why does this happen?

You see, the goal of any search engine is to provide the most applicable and useful information to their users. It just so happens that by changing the keyword, your results will change because some sites are “optimized” for a certain keyword while others are not. As you can tell from the image above, just simply changing the order of the words you type into Google can completely change the results.

Why ranking on the First Page of Google Matters

Have you ever heard this phrase before? “Businesses go to die on the second page of Google.” It’s **sad but true**.

This **case study by Moz** takes a look at where users are clicking on local search results. As you can see below, the majority of all clicks are happening at the top of page one and the majority of all clicks (98%) happen on page one.



After analyzing some of the data from this study, I found a few key takeaways:

1. An organic result listed above the local snack pack receives 56% more clicks than the local results.
2. The top 3 local results (businesses listed in the snack pack) received 44% of all clicks when listed below advertisements.
3. Local businesses with the highest review rating received more clicks than businesses without review score.
4. Just because a business is in the local snack pack doesn't mean it'll perform well. Without reviews, users are 40% more likely to resort to the first organic listing instead of the local result.
5. Paid results receive between 15-20% of clicks

Basically, all of this boils down to one thing: **being on the first page of Google matters.**

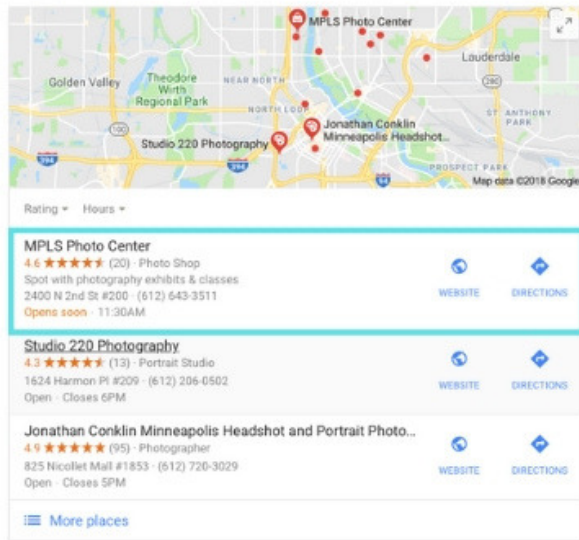
What Does a Local SEO Strategy Look Like?

.In my experience of creating local SEO strategies, I can tell you one thing: they're all different. Don't let that discourage you, though. One of my favorite parts about being an SEO is the constant adaptability and learning necessary to succeed. Whether you're working on client's SEO or working towards running your own SEO for your business, you'll want to document and track your performance in case you need to make changes on the fly.

An SEO strategy can be in any format. From a presentation to a plain old Google Doc. Just document it. It's important that you have clear next steps on how to execute on your local SEO strategy and that it's tailored to your goals.

Now that we've covered the basics, let's take an in depth look at each of our 10 local SEO strategy tips for 2019.

TIP #1: CLAIM AND OPTIMIZE GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



Optimization Checklist

- Accurate Business Name
- Accurate Address
- Accurate Phone Number
- Link to Website
- High Review Rating
- Business Hours Listed

Claim your Google My Business Page

The very first step in getting your business to rank at the top Google's local snack pack is to claim your [Google My Business Page](#). After logging in, you'll want to make sure you put in 100% correct business information. Make sure your NAP (Name, Address, and Phone Number) is filled out completely, link to your website, and list your business hours. When you're done, jump over to [Bing Places](#) and do the same thing.

Verify your Google My Business Page

After setting up your account, you'll be asked to verify your business. Verifying your Google My Business page is a pretty straightforward process. Google will send you a postcard with a PIN to your local business address and you'll enter that into your account after receiving the postcard. Make sure your address is a physical location where mail can be accepted - no PO boxes. While you're waiting for the verification, you'll want to optimize your GMB page as much as possible. Here are a few tips to do that:

Tips for Optimizing Your Google My Business Page

- Enter your physical address completely. Your business address should match your NAP (I'll cover more on NAP in the next tip). If you're a service-area based company without an address, select that option during setup and Google won't show your address.
- If you're working with multiple locations, each location needs to have their own listing.
- Your business name should be 100% accurate. Be sure not to add any keywords or change your name from your NAP.
- Google discourages the use of toll-free numbers in their local listings. Be sure to use a local number and never toll-free. If you have multiple locations, make sure each of them has their own local number.
- If you have a website, make sure to list your URL on your GMB page. If you have multiple locations or service multiple areas, link each location GMB account to the page for that location on your website.
- Add categories that fit your business. If your products or services vary by location, make sure your GMB page for that location reflects its proper services.
- Add pictures to your GMB page. I always recommend pictures of the inside and outside of your business, pictures of your team, employees doing their jobs, and anything else you can show to build trust with Google and its users. I don't recommend using stock photos - make sure they're unique.
- Add any additional information like hours and prices if it's applicable to your business.

Now that your account is setup, verified, and optimized, the foundation for a powerful local SEO strategy is in place. Let's move on to building local citations.

TIP #2: BUILD LOCAL CITATIONS



One of the easiest ways to raise awareness of your brand to search engines is to build local citations. A citation is any mention of your business anywhere on the internet. This can include places like Yellow Pages, Yelp, Angie's List, BBB, Facebook, etcetera. In order to maximize the efficiency of your citations, there are a couple things we should go over.

Make Sure NAP is Consistent Everywhere

As I heavily emphasized in tip #1 with GMB optimization, every citation of your business on the internet should have a consistent Name, Address, and Phone Number (NAP). This means if you're using Ave. instead of Avenue or Blvd. instead of Boulevard in your street address, you should use the abbreviation with every business listing. Google made NAP consistency a heavy ranking factor back in [2014 with their Penguin update](#) making this vital to any local SEO strategy.

Tips for Building Effective Local Citations

- If you have multiple locations make sure to list every location when adding your business to a new local directory.
- Never use PO boxes in your business listings. If there are currently PO boxes listed in current citations, update them to a physical address that perfectly matches your GMB listing.
- Standardize use of abbreviations (Blvd. vs. Blvd vs. Boulevard)
- Submit your data to the big 4 data aggregators: Neustar/Localeze, Acxiom, Factual, and Infogroup
- Submit your website and business info to niche directories like YellowPages, Alignable, or SuperPages. There may be small directories specific to your location. A simple search for local business directories in your area should result in a few of them.

Local citation building is paramount for any local SEO strategy. Search engines are all about finding the most accurate and useful information for their customers. By having your business citations optimized, you're allowing search algorithms to have a better understanding of your business which allows them to place you in front of the right people.

One thing to keep in mind though: as I pointed out from [Moz's case study](#) a few scrolls up, just because a business appears in the local snack pack, that doesn't mean it'll receive clicks. Without reviews, customers are 44% more likely to resort to the organic ranking below the local snack pack instead of the local result. So, let's talk about managing and collecting reviews as part of your local SEO strategy.

TIP #3: COLLECT AND MONITOR REVIEWS

Local SEO strategy is about putting yourself in the shoes of the searcher. When you search for new places to eat at, what matters to you most when making a decision? For me, it's reviews. If a restaurant has consistently bad reviews, I almost never go (you really have to twist my arm). I also don't go to restaurants who ignore their bad reviews and don't work to solve a customer's experience.

Search Engine Land [published an article back in 2016](#) after running a survey regarding consumer shopping habits prior to a purchase. They came to a few key takeaways:

1. **84%** of people trust online reviews as much as a personal recommendation.
2. **70%** of people will leave a review for a business if asked.
3. **90%** of people will trust a business after reading fewer than 10 reviews.



The crazy part: this was 2 years ago! Think about how these numbers might have changed. If you ask me, reviews should be at the VERY top of your focus. Start by having previous customers submit reviews to your Facebook and your Google My Business listing(s). In order to collect more reviews, implement a follow up email series asking for your customer's review. Be sure to comment on all of them to show your appreciation and solve any customer concerns.

Managing reviews as part of your local SEO strategy can get tedious so here a few tools to help automate the process:

- [Reviews.io](#)
- [Trust Pilot](#)
- [BrightLocal](#)
- [Vendasta](#)
- [Yext Reviews](#)
- [Review Trackers](#)

The truth is reviews matter. The more you have and the better your ranking, the [higher you'll rank for keywords in your area](#). More importantly, though, your customers will trust you before they even land on your site or give you a call.

You could have the worst website as far as SEO is considered and still rank #1 locally simply from the number of reviews you have. If this doesn't excite you about the possibility to outrank your competitors, I'm not sure what will. Work hard to monitor and collect reviews and there's no doubt you'll see results.

TIP #4: ADD LOCAL SCHEMA MARKUP TO YOUR SITE

“Add what to who?” I literally said that out loud the first time I heard about schema markup. Schema markup goes by a couple of names. You might have heard it referred to as Structured Data Markup or [Schema.org](#) markup. Basically, all it boils down to is some code that’s added to your website that allows search engines to better understand your business, products or services you sell, reviews you’ve collected, and more.

Google wants this structured markup on your site so its web crawlers can gather more information about your business. The more information they can gather, the more relevant you become and higher you rank. Data markup is still relatively new and in 2015, only [31.3 percent of sites were using it](#). Chances are, even for 2019 on the horizon, having structured data markup on your site will still set you apart from the rest.

How to add Structured Markup to Your Website

Adding structure markup to a website truly has never been easier. Chances are, your website is built on Wordpress or a CMS that offers plugins. Simply visit the plugin or app store for your website CMS and search for a structured data markup plugin. Keep an eye out for good reviews and a lot of installs as you look for a plugin. Here are a few great resources for walkthrough guides on installing structured markup to your website regardless of your website platform:

[How to add Schema Markup to your Wordpress Website](#)

[How to add Schema Markup to your Wix Website](#)

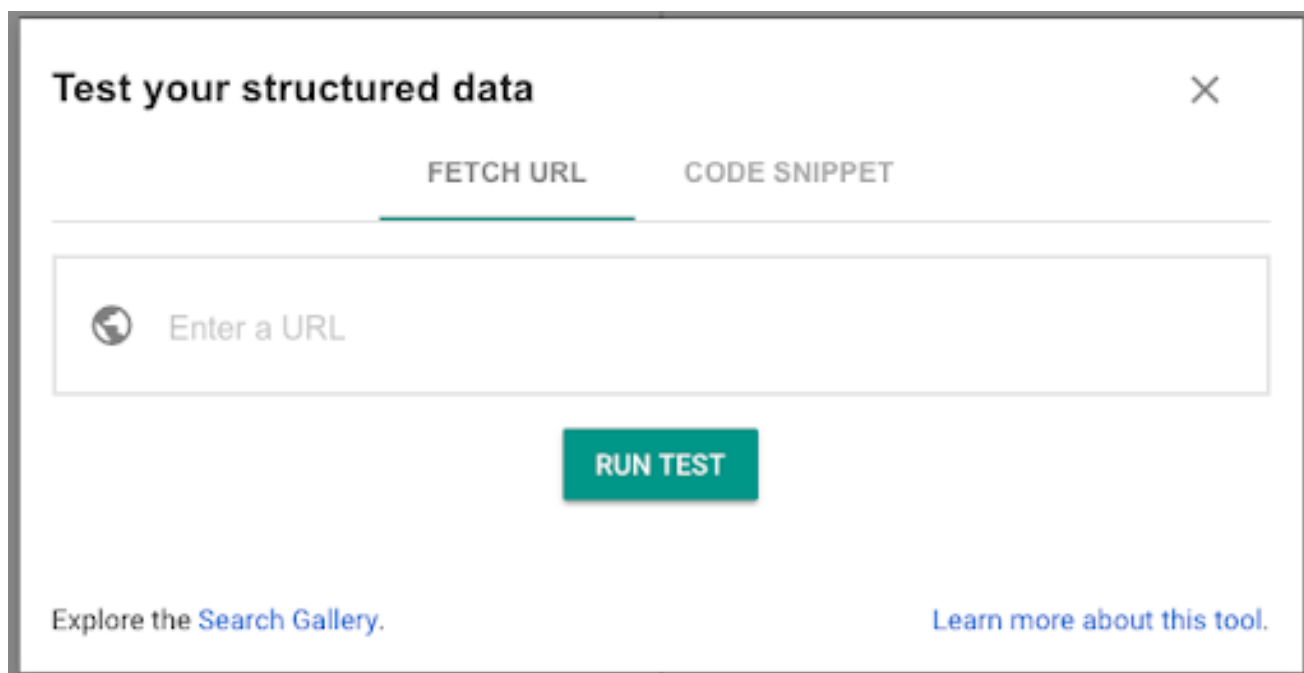
[How to add Schema Markup Using Google Tag Manager](#)

[How to add Schema Markup to your Shopify Website](#)

[How to add Schema Markup Using Google’s Data Highlighter](#)

Test Your Website for Schema Markup

Once you've gotten Schema Markup installed on your site, jump over to [Google's free Structured Data Testing Tool](#) so you can make sure it's installed correctly and not causing any warnings or errors.. You can check your markup by fetching a URL from your site or pasting in your code directly.



The image shows a screenshot of the 'Test your structured data' tool interface. At the top, there is a title 'Test your structured data' and a close button (X). Below the title, there are two tabs: 'FETCH URL' and 'CODE SNIPPET'. The 'FETCH URL' tab is selected. Underneath the tabs, there is a large text input field with a globe icon and the placeholder text 'Enter a URL'. Below the input field is a prominent green button labeled 'RUN TEST'. At the bottom of the interface, there are two links: 'Explore the Search Gallery.' on the left and 'Learn more about this tool.' on the right.

Making sure search engines understand the content on your website is critical for any local SEO strategy in 2019. Schema markup allows all search engines to easily understand the content on your site so they can put you in front of the right searchers.

So now that schema is installed correctly, let's dive into on-site SEO - the practice of optimizing the content and structure of your website.

TIP #5: ON-SITE SEO: OPTIMIZE YOUR SITE CONTENT FOR SEARCH ENGINES

You've heard this analogy before: you have to lay the foundation before you can build a house. Up until this point in the guide, we've been laying the foundation for your local SEO strategy. Now that we have all of the parts in place for search engines to understand your site easily and recognize your business as a reputable entity, we need to shift our focus to optimizing the content and structure of your website.

Optimize URLs, Titles, and Meta Descriptions

Although this is a little more technical, optimized URLs, titles, and meta descriptions are essential to any successful local SEO strategy. If I search for "photographers in Minneapolis", Google shows me this as one of the results:



Note a few great things about this SERP (Search Engine Result Page):

1. The keyword, "photographers in Minneapolis" appears in the title and meta description once.
2. The URL is legible and not full of random keywords, numbers, or letters. It's closely optimized for the keyword as well.
3. The meta description isn't cut off for being too long and it calls for an action. It's clear right away what I'll be able to find on that page.

These three things make up a fully optimized search engine result. Now let's take a look at a SERP that's not correctly optimized and how we'd fix it:

Meghan Elizabeth Photography

<https://meghanelizabethphotographymn.com/> ▼

Meghan Elizabeth Photography is a boutique newborn photography studio in Minneapolis with ...
Meghan Elizabeth Photography Newborn Minneapolis ... Baby Photography Minneapolis Minnesota;
Maternity Photography Minneapolis ...

Right off the bat, I'm seeing a few things. First, the meta description makes it clear what Meghan's specialty is. However, it doesn't call to action. It doesn't prompt an action from the user. The URL looks great and the title just needs a little bit more information. Let's see what an optimized version of this might look like:

Title: Meghan Elizabeth | Newborn and Baby Photography | Minneapolis, MN

Meta Description: Meghan Elizabeth Photography is a boutique newborn photography studio in Minneapolis. Call for a free consultation: xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Here's a full list of URL, title, and meta description best practices for your local SEO strategy:

1. Make sure title is between 50-70 characters.
2. Meta description should be between 120-158 characters.
3. Make sure your target keyword is in the title, URL, and meta description.
4. Make sure your meta description is clear and calls for action from the user.
5. Make sure you have a unique meta description and title for every page.

Optimize Current Content for Local Keywords

Part of any strong local SEO strategy is having focused and intentional content on your website. Every page should have at least 500 words of relevant and keyword focused copy. If you have multiple locations, build individual pages for each area you service with embedded Google maps and link to them from your navigation.

Remember, the whole idea behind any search engine's goal is to provide the best and most relevant information to its users. That means they're going to rank the sites with the best and most relevant content first.

One of the best ways to build content is to start a blog about the services you provide. Using tools like SEMRush and ahrefs, you can conduct keyword research and write blogs targeted to specific searchers (I reference some great tools at the end of the guide as well). You can write how-to guides, showcase client work, provide tips specific to your industry, etc. - there are a ton of options out there. For a complete look into keyword research and starting your content strategy, [check out this guide from Neil Patel](#).

Improve Your Site's Internal Linking Structure

Internal linking is simply linking to one of your pages within your website from another page within your website - hence, internal. The idea behind internal linking is that having a strong network of interconnected pages will help users navigate through your site, increase user engagement, and ultimately result in a better user experience. Because of this effect from internal linking, search engines will rank your site higher in comparison to sites with a weak internal linking structure. Linking internally will also disperse page authority and rank between linked pages making them more valuable.

But what does good internal linking look like? [A blog from Neil Patel](#) looks at exactly that. Here's the quicknotes version of the best internal linking practices for your local SEO strategy:

1. Create in-depth, relevant content, consistently. This will give you more of your pages to link to.
2. Use anchor text rather than direct links when linking to another page.
3. Avoid linking to your homepage and contact us page. Only link to your contact us page where absolutely necessary.
4. Make sure your links are relevant.
5. Keep your [internal links to a reasonable number](#). Make it feel organic. Links shouldn't be stuffed all over the place, just where they're most relevant and useful for the reader.

TIP #6: OFF-SITE SEO - BUILD RELEVANT & HIGH-AUTHORITY LINKS

One of the most effective ways to increase your rankings and organic traffic is to acquire backlinks from other websites. Backlinks are links that are posted on other sites that point to yours. The reason these are so effective is because each link adds more authority to your site. More authority equals higher rankings and more traffic to your site.

In tip #2, we talked about building local citations with local business directories. Each time you list your business in one of these directories, you'll receive a link back to your website. Now of course business directories are finite so here's a few tips for getting more backlinks to your site:

1. Collaborate with local blogs on blog posts and start guest posting.
2. Join your city's Chamber of Commerce and list your business.
3. Join the Better Business Bureau. The BBB has huge domain authority and having a BBB seal is a trust indicator for both search engines and your users.
4. Attend and sponsor local events to list your business on other sites.
5. Work with the local press to talk about your business. This can be in the form of blogs, radio segments, Podcasts, or video segments. Links from news websites are typically extremely valuable because of the authority they have.
6. Share your content with other bloggers in your industry to get links back to your site.

TIP #7: CREATE A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Marketing is all about optimizing as many channels as possible for traffic. Social media can be one of the best ways to generate local traffic to your business and is a must have in your local SEO strategy. People take pride in their communities and using social media can be a great way to stay in touch with those people. Aside from the benefits of social exposure and trust from customers researching your company, being active on social media has huge benefits for SEO.

Part of a search engine's algorithm is to decide whether or not your site has domain authority in your niche. One of the easiest ways to be seen as an authoritative site is to have a social media strategy in place. You can use tools like Buffer, Hootsuite, or Sprout Social, to automate your social media posting and gain insights about your followers.

Tips for Winning at Social Media

1. Make sure each of your social profiles are optimized.
2. Remember the 80/20 rule: make sure 80% of your posts are conversational and 20% promotional.
3. Build trust by sharing photos of your office and team.
4. Be social! Respond to comments, participate in others' posts, and promote discussion with your own posts.
5. Share customer reviews.
6. Post frequently and consistently.
7. Cross promote your other channels.
8. Promote your blog and other content creation (YouTube, Podcasts, etc)

TIP #8: OPTIMIZE YOUR SITE FOR USER EXPERIENCE AND SPEED

Over the last year, [site speed has become a HUGE deal for rankings](#). And this makes sense when you think about it. If a Google's goal is to provide the best user experience possible, why would they show a site that hasn't been optimized properly? The answer is now they won't.

Another thing to keep in mind about site speed and user experience is up to this point, if you're following this guide closely, you've optimized the content on your website and built a really solid foundation for generating organic traffic. Not having a mobile friendly and speed friendly site can drastically lower the effect of all of your other efforts. Not only will search engines begin to devalue your site, but so will your users.

Tips for Optimizing Site Speed and User Experience

1. Test your website for mobile friendliness using [Google's free tool](#).
2. Test your site speed using [Google's free tool](#).
3. Use a fast and reliable hosting provider. [Here's a list](#) of the fastest hosting providers for 2019.
4. Use a content delivery network for your site's images and files. My personal recommendations are CloudFlare or Stackpath (MaxCDN).
5. Minify javascript and CSS files
6. Aim for a site speed under 3 seconds. Here's a great article on why.
7. Don't go more than 5 years without a site redesign. Stay modern with design trends and user experience.
8. Stay up to date with the latest trends in speed optimization. Technology is ever-changing and it's all about keeping up,

I can't stress enough how important site speed and user experience is for a successful local SEO strategy in 2019. If you're not an expert at website development and setting up some of the aforementioned tips seem challenging, use Upwork or Fiverr to find someone who's experienced in site speed optimization and web development. You can often find an experienced developer for great prices.

TIP #9: INTEGRATE YOUR LOCAL SEO STRATEGY WITH OTHER MARKETING CHANNELS

One of the biggest mistakes I see businesses make when it comes to marketing is having tunnel vision. I often run into articles that talk about SEO vs. PPC or why one is better than the other. But that's not the point at all. In order to be successful in your marketing efforts, you need to have an omni-channel approach.

Search engine optimization performs best when combined with other marketing efforts. In fact, tip #7 was all about social media as a marketing channel and how that affects a site's organic performance.

Even more so than social media, when combined with SEO, paid advertising works extremely well. If you recall from earlier in the guide, we talked briefly about where people are clicking after searching for something, we found that [up to 20% of clicks](#) go to paid ads. Combine that with local and organic rankings and you'll dominate the entire first page of Google.

My whole point here is to make sure you don't lose sight of the bigger picture as you build out your strategy. By no means do you have to tackle every marketing channel at once but as you get more comfortable managing SEO, move on to social media, then maybe email marketing or Google Ads, and then onto the next channel. This omni-channel approach will help ensure you don't lose business in the event something changes.

For example, in regards to SEO, if Google releases an algorithm update tomorrow that causes my website to plummet in ranking, it might take me days, weeks, maybe even months to recover depending on what changed. By having an omni-channel approach, even though I may have lost organic traffic, I can rely on my other channels to perform for me.

TIP #10: USE TOOLS TO MONITOR AND AUTOMATE

Okay so we've obviously covered a lot about what to do for your local SEO strategy. Tip #10 is all about managing and automating your efforts. Below you'll find a list of each of the tools I use on a daily basis. From keyword research to backlink management and local citations, here are my favorites (they're in no particular order):

1. [Google Analytics](#)

Google Analytics is a must have for any website. Google's free analytics tool easily plugs in to your website to give you realtime and historical trend data about your website. Google Analytics is a full suite of reporting tools that'll help you understand how your site is performing at any moment.

2. [Google Search Console](#)

Another must have for your website, Google Search Console helps measure your site's traffic and performance, helps identify search related problems, and provides recommendations to help your site shine in search results.

3. [Yoast SEO for Wordpress](#)

Yoast SEO is Wordpress's #1 SEO plugin and for good reason: they make SEO easy for anybody. Yoast is packed full of features like a keyword density checker, live recommendations to improve each of your pages, easy to setup social cards, and easy to use schema markup. If your site isn't on Wordpress, I'd consider switching simply to use Yoast SEO.

4. [Moz Local](#)

I've referenced Moz quite a few times at this point and there's a reason for it: they're really good at what they do. Moz local is the best local citation and directory management tool out there, period. You can manage your local business listings, make sure your listings are accurate, manage duplicate listings, along with submitting your business information to the largest data aggregators.

5. [SEMRush](#)

SEMRush is one of the most popular tools for marketing out there. Here's a look into some tasks I use SEMRush for:

1. Technical SEO audits
2. Backlink audit and analysis
3. Position tracking
4. Competitive intelligence and analysis
5. Keyword research

SEMRush was actually the very first tool I invested in as a marketer. If you're starting out with SEO, this is definitely the tool to start you out.

6. [LocalSEOChecklist.org](#)

Local SEO checklist is a free tool that offers over 40 different recommendations for optimizing your local SEO performance. This is a great tool if investing in higher priced tools isn't an option.

7. [UberSuggest](#)

UberSuggest is a free tool offered by Neil Patel, another SEO I reference quite frequently. Neil is a leader in content marketing and ranking #1 in Google. UberSuggest is all about helping you conduct in depth keyword research for FREE by pulling in data from search engines directly. This is one of my favorite tools to use as I'm writing a new piece of content.

8. [AnswerThePublic](#)

AnswerThePublic is a tool that creates visualization of how people are searching for a given keyword. This revolutionary tool provides insights on the emotions of users as they search for a given keyword providing you with a plethora of data and content ideas surrounding a keyword. AnswerThePublic works best as a paid tool but they offer a great free version as well.

9. KeywordsEverywhere

KeywordsEverywhere is a free Google chrome extension that provides incredibly useful insights as you're searching. Keywords everywhere has search analytics for over 20 different search engines. I use this literally all the time as I conduct keyword research. When I'm searching Google for a keyword, it'll provide LSI keywords, average CPC, and competition. This is an absolute must-have if you're just starting out.

10. Google

Believe it or not, Google is one of the best tools for keyword research. You can use Google to provide information about other things users are searching for, other questions people ask, and it of course allows you to see who your competition is for a given keyword. Be sure to use Google search as a resource when conducting keyword research so you can cover as many topics related to the keyword you're competing for.

Conclusion

Local SEO, more than anything, is about crafting the most helpful and usable information in your industry. A lot of SEO is simply execution. It's a lot of work and it may take time to see results but it compounds exponentially once you've been going at it for awhile. The bottom line is simple: why pay for traffic when you can earn it?