

Local SEO Checklist

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Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a complex field. It's a cat-and-mouse game between the needs of businesses to draw traffic and the needs of search engines to provide the best results for their searchers. The latest frontier in this uneasy arrangement is local SEO. Local SEO is a set of SEO techniques that aims to show your website to people in your local area.

If you are a business that wants to improve your local SEO, we've created a checklist that will help you get on track and explain why these things are important for your website along the way. We've also linked to a lot of guides that give instructions on how to do these tasks.

SEO Basics And Research

Website Audit

Good local SEO starts with good general SEO. The first step to do before making any SEO changes is to do an SEO audit. While you could do all the steps of an audit on your own, using an SEO services company is the best route to get a comprehensive look at where you stand.

If you don't want to do that, there are tools that can help you get the basics right like Moz, SEOptimer, and SEOmeter. Some have free versions, others require payment. But however you do it, you need the audit so you can get the fundamental research you need to make changes that will benefit your local SEO.

- Got an Audit

Fix Technical SEO

Your audit will be divided into three broad classes, technical, on-page, and off-page SEO. Technical SEO techniques use your site's source code to help search engines understand your site better. These are all low-hanging fruit and should be targeted first.

You may need the help of your web designer or your ISP to fix all of the issues, depending on what is found. Adding a robots.txt file is easy, but adding responsiveness to a non-responsive site will take time and planning.

- Fix all technical SEO problems first.

Conduct Keyword Research

Keywords are what search engines use to link a searcher's query to your website. This is the start of on-page SEO. You have to do research to figure out which words your audience could use to search for your business.

Finding strong keywords is the bread-and-butter of SEO companies, but if you're willing to get into the weeds on this you can do your own keyword research.

Your SEO audit should also include a list of keywords that are already ranking on your site. At this stage, you don't need to do anything to fix or add to your current keyword batch. That will come in two steps. But you will want to note which keywords have the best performance for your niche.

- Conduct keyword research, finding at least ten keywords to use.

Conduct Competitor Research

This part is simple. Run searches on your keywords and find out where you rank and who ranks above you. This will give you a list of competitors. Winning at the SEO game is less about impressing search engines and more about doing better than the competitors around you for a keyword. This research will also give you a baseline to record your SEO successes against.

This article from Neil Patel explains more about SEO competitor analysis [<https://neilpatel.com/blog/the-simple-but-effective-guide-to-keyword-competitionanalysis/>] and why it is important. Some of the information in this will be addressed in later steps, but it will give you the overview.

- Go through your keywords and find your competitors [<https://onceinteractive.com/blog/how-to-identify-your-competitors/>] and rankings

Local SEO Basics

Before we move on to improving on-page and off-page SEO, let's look at the easy wins we can get with local SEO techniques. Getting all the easy things squared away first will make later efforts much more powerful.

Citations

Just like your domain identifies your website, your business citation identifies your company in physical space. At its most essential, your business citation is your business's name, address, and phone number. When you register your business, this information is shared with a lot of different databases. This is how sites like Yelp can know about your business before you claim it.

However, it is possible for these citations to get out of sync with one another. Something as simple as whether to use a street abbreviation or not can confuse a search engine or site. Getting your citations cleaned up is part of local technical SEO. There are companies that will do this for you, but it is possible to do it yourself with a little legwork.

Before you do it, create a standardized business citation you'll use on your website and post it there before approaching sites who have the wrong information. It will help you prove your case.

- Create a standardized business citation you'll use across the internet
- Petition sites and databases with the wrong information to the correct one

Google My Business (GMB)

Once your citations are in order, it's time to look at Google My Business. If you have a physical location where customers come to your office, this is a must-have. A GMB entry will link your business deep into Google's search services, especially their mapping service. Your site will be linked to the map and you'll gain access to a knowledge card about your business where you can set up all sorts of useful information, as well as receive reviews.

Google will use this information to further optimize your local SEO, so don't neglect this! If you are getting a lot of searches on Bing as well, investigate Bing Places. There is a verification process for both services that will take a few days, so be prepared for that.

- Get a GMB (and maybe Bing Places) account

Social Media Pages

The next step is to set up relevant social media pages for your business. These include both social media pages and review sites like Yelp. You don't have to set up on every single site out there, thankfully, but you do need to set up pages on the ones where your audience is most likely to interact with you.

If you're new to social media for business, you might want to stick with one review site and one social media site until you get the hang of it. But extending your presence into these sites will give your business a much greater chance of being found.

Furthermore, it will give your audience a chance to share their experiences with your business. If you can gather good reviews and build a regular social media presence, your website and search queries won't have to do all the heavy lifting for promotion and lead generation.

As a starting point, if you're a B2C business then choose Facebook or Instagram as your social media page. If you're B2B, choose LinkedIn. For reviews, you can use GMB as well as Yelp for either.

- Choose an appropriate social media site
- Claim your site on Yelp

On-Page SEO

At this point, everything is in place to begin improving your site's on-page SEO. You have your keywords and the competitors you want to beat. On-site SEO is a process of putting the keywords you want to target into places of high-relevancy on your pages. By putting keywords into titles, headings, page descriptions, and in your content, you tell search engines what your page is about.

It is NOT a matter of stuffing as many keywords as possible into your pages. That is an old SEO tactic that no longer works. Instead, put your most important keywords on your home page and then create content pages that use your other keywords.

Anytime you place a keyword, ask yourself if it makes sense to a human to put the keyword there. Search engines want to find content that looks good for people, not machines, and they have become much better at it than in the past.

If all this talk of placing keywords is confusing, here is a guide from Ahrefs that explains how to do it and why. While we're on the subject of on-page SEO, you may want to investigate using Schema to give search engines explicit information about your website. It's a type of technical SEO, but it's more advanced than what we've talked about so far. Consider this an optional step to get a little bit more juice out of your SEO. Here's a guide from Moz about it.

- Optimize your current content with your best keywords
- Consider creating new content to get a presence on other keywords
- Consider investigating Schema markup

Off-Page SEO

The last piece of the puzzle is off-page SEO. The essential tasks are to get high-quality links back to your site and to create a presence on other websites where your audience can find you.

Search engines use links back to your site (backlinks) as an indication of popularity. If a site is willing to link to you, that's a marker of trust and popularity. If that site is also a popular one, that link will have a greater weight in how search engines calculate where you should rank.

There are a number of strategies to increase off-page SEO, like guest posting, writing press releases, and others. The strategy that will work best depends on the type of business you have and how far you want to go with it.

The easiest way to start building off-page SEO signals is to start putting content into your social media channels that link back to your website. Even a weekly post with a link back to your website will start the process. Also, soliciting reviews on GMB, Yelp, and other review sites will also build your off-page SEO status.

One thing to **avoid** is building a lot of links too quickly. There are sites that promise to get you thousands of links in a few days. These links will be low quality and search engines punish people who try to take advantage of the system this way. Increasing and improving your backlink profile is a long-term game, which is why it is the last item on our list.

- Investigate off-page SEO strategies
- Find sites in your niche that need content and/or are highly valued by your audience
- Strategize how to get content with a backlink on those sites.

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Whew! There's quite a lot to **good SEO**, isn't there? The good thing is that it's made up of a bunch of smaller steps. Just do what you can. In fact, it can take quite some time for changes on your site to get noticed by search engines.

If you have a brand new site, expect at least 3-6 months before your ranks start to settle. Changes for existing sites can still take a month to get noticed. There are billions of websites and it takes a while for search engines to come back around to yours. One way around this is to post content regularly. A site that updates often gets more notice.

