

WHY

LOCAL SEO

IS BUSINESS CRITICAL

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IN SUMMARY

WHAT IS LOCAL SEO?

The objective of Local SEO is to raise your business' presence to local prospects.

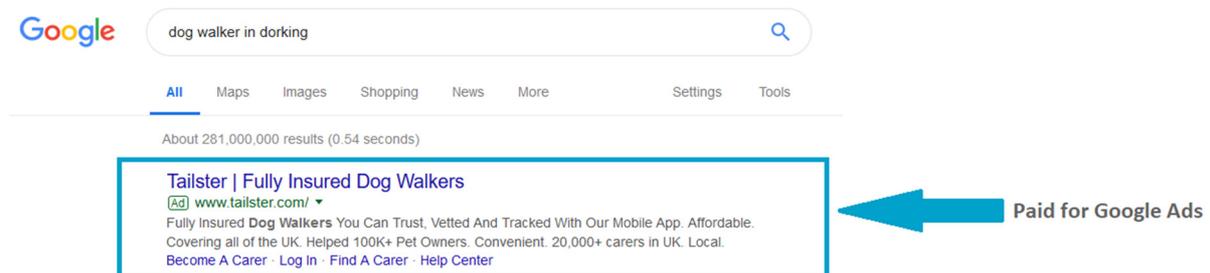
Local SEO serves to promote your business' visibility on location-based searches in particular on [Google My Business](#), [Bing Places for Business](#) and [Apple Maps](#) (Apple's iPhone has over 30% market share and Apple Maps is the default map application).

The days of potential customers picking up the phone directory or even looking at the local paper to find your business are long gone. Your potential customer will use a search engine on their computer, tablet or mobile phone and **46% of all searches are local searches.**

Research shows that the majority of searches are performed simply by typing in the service followed by the town or city (such as dog walker in Dorking) or just the service such as dog walker. Search engines like Google and Bing use the potential customer's geo-location and display the relevant local businesses – **your business must be highlighted on the map.**

Analysis of a Typical Google Search Results Page

At the very top of the search results in Google there are paid for adverts for local businesses.



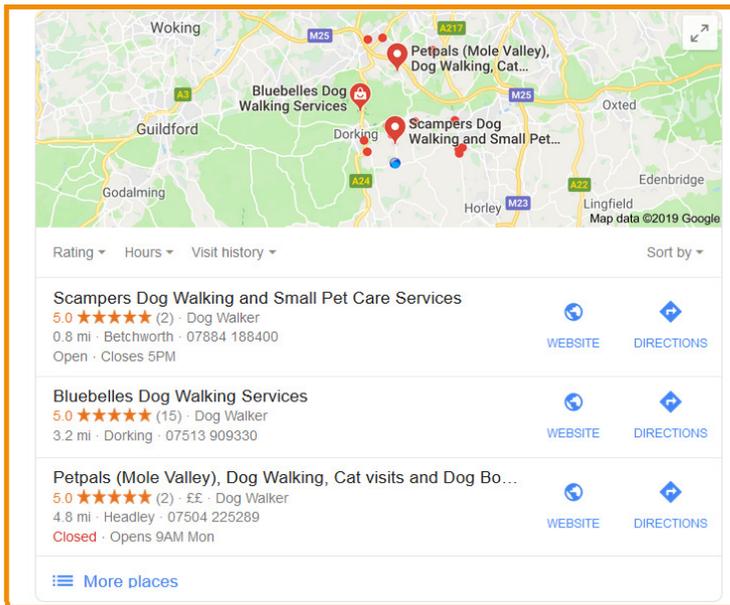
Next comes the Google Local 3 Pack, which is a combination of Google Maps and Google My Business. This is a free service that Google provide to local businesses and it is critical to get your business into the top three listings and highlighted on the map.

This is a very competitive space and for this reason it is critical to ensure:

1. Your Google My Business listing is fully optimised, see below what needs to be done
2. Get customers to write reviews of your business, see Google Review Cards
3. Engage fully with Google My Business posting offers, responding to reviews etc.

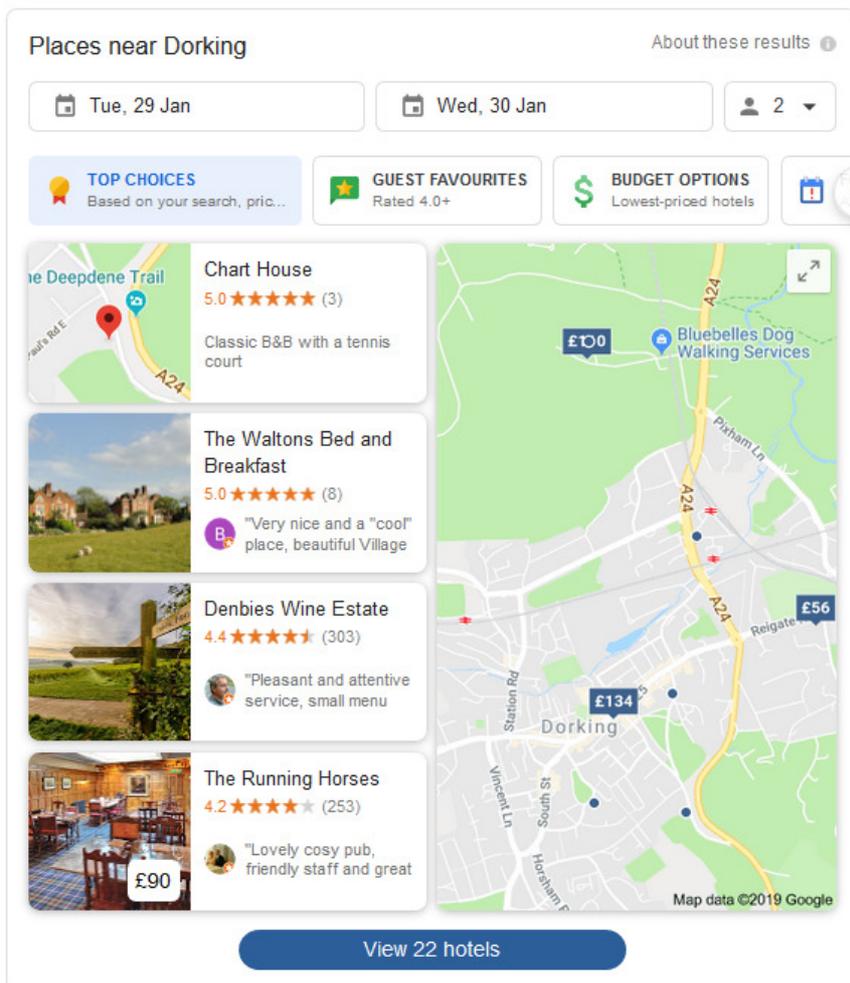
Below is an example of a Google 3 Pack – **remember there is a More Places but below the top three listing** but virtually no one clicks there – **you must be in the top three.**

According to a [Moz blog](#) they found that 33% of people click on one of the three listings in the 3-pack.



← Google Local 3 Pack

What is interesting is the Google Local 3 Pack is changing for some industry sectors, for example accommodation, an example of which you can see below.



WHAT INFLUENCES LOCAL SEO?

When considering Local SEO there is no doubt that Google has the greatest influence as 92.25% of all global searches are done on Google according to [Statcounter](#). If you optimise your Google My Business listing other things such as Bing Local Places will fall into place.

WHAT INFLUENCES GOOGLE

The [2018 Local Search Ranking Factors](#) report published by Moz:

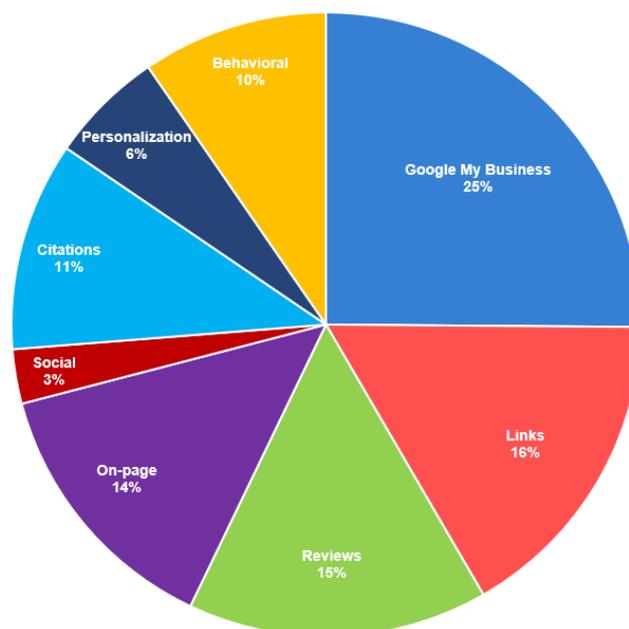
“Huge growth in Google My Business

Google has been adding features to GMB at an accelerated rate. They see the revenue potential in local, and now that they have properly divorced Google My Business from Google+, they have a clear runway to develop (and monetize) local. Here are just some of the major GMB features that have been released since the publication of the 2017 Local Search Ranking Factors:

- Google Posts available to all GMB users
- Google Q&A
- Website builder
- Services
- Messaging
- Videos

These features are creating shifts in the importance of factors that are driving local search. This year has seen the most explosive growth in GMB specific factors in the history of the survey. GMB signals now make up 25% the local pack/finder pie chart.”

Local Pack/Finder Breakdown 2018



SETTING UP YOUR GOOGLE MY BUSINESS LISTING

Step 1: If you do not have a Gmail account you will need to set one up... remember Google like you to be using their tools!

If you don't have a Google My Business listing or have not claimed it yet then [click here](#).

It maybe that your listing has already been claimed and you need to claim it back from an old web developer etc. If you need to do this please [contact us](#).

Step 2: Verification – this is normally done by Google sending a postcard with a unique number to your postal address to confirm this really is your business address. When you receive the number log back into your Google My Listing and add the code.

Step 3: Make sure your Google My Business profiles is 100% complete; don't leave any empty fields.

For example, make sure you add videos and photographs of your business/products and optimise them with your key words and geographic location, e.g. wedding photographer in Sunderland.

Step 4: Once again use all the Google tools - even if you are not using it (although you should) create and verify Google Analytics account and install it on your website.

Create a YouTube channel and upload a couple of optimised videos and link them back to your Google My Business listing.

Create and verify a Google Ads account and Google Search Console.

Step 5: Don't worry too much what it is, but ensure your web developer implements Schema Markup (a structured way of delivering information to the search engines) on your website.

Businesses who adopt Schema Markup get rewarded with what are known as 'rich results' in search. These rich results range from product information and ratings to local business information, actions, information panels on the right-hand side of the screen, and more.

Tip: Check out your competition. What information are they listing on their Google My Business listing that you are not.

Call us on 07870 568189 if you have any questions about Local SEO.

LOCAL CITATIONS

WHAT ARE LOCAL CITATIONS

Local citations are listings of your business with a minimum of Name, Address and Phone Number (NAP) and often with links back to your website.

Citations are used by the search engines to determine the trust that your business actually is what and where it says it is. Many of these directories will need verification, in a similar way to Google My Business. Listing your business in the prominent national and local directories helps build trust for the search engines that you are who you say you are.

It is critical that all your citations show **the same** Name, Address and Phone Number as on your website and Google My Business listing. They must match – any discrepancy confuses Google and will penalise your Local SEO. Therefore, if you have moved premises make sure you update all local citations you have set up.

Tip: If you can add a business description in your citation add in important keywords

Tip: Add your NAP to the footer of every page of your website

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CITATIONS

There are three main types of citation sites:

- National directories such as Yell, Yelp, Qype, Scoot and Thomson
- Local directories for example a countywide directory such as [Surrey Online](#) or a town specific directory such as [Horley Online](#).
- Industry specific directories such as the [Accountant Directory](#) or the [National Council of Hypnotherapists](#).

GETTING LOCAL CITATIONS

In Moz's 2018 report they identified that the importance of citations for your ranking in the Google 3-Pack had fallen sharply; however, there are still very important to get and our recommendation is to grow your citation list to over 50 directories.

Tip: Keep a list of all the directories (and user name and passwords) you register on so that if you change any of your details you can easily go back amend your listings.

Tip: Check where your local competitors are listed by entering the following search string in Google.

"full company name" "company post code" -site:url
e.g. "JMW Solicitors LLP" "M3 3HG" -https://www.jmw.co.uk

[Find out how well optimised your Google My Business listing is.](#)

KEEPING YOUR GOOGLE MY BUSINESS LISTING LIVE

Google want you to engage with your customers and potential customers on their platform. In essence they want to keep people on Google as long as possible. To do this they are now giving weight to Google Posts.

GOOGLE POSTS

As always it is never possible to say exactly what influences the Google algorithms but if you add optimised content in your Google Posts they will certainly not penalise you and in addition it enables people to engage with you through another localised platform. If you are posting in other social media platforms it is definitely worth posting on Google Posts, especially as the majority of your competitors aren't – **so stand out.**

Tip: Add fresh posts on a minimum of a weekly basis.

PHOTOS AND VIDEOS

Continually post new photos and videos, maybe of products, premises (inside and out), events etc., maybe even encourage your customers to add some as well. All of that activity is helpful.

The vast majority of local businesses are not doing this, so this will make you stand out.

Tip: Add fresh photos on a minimum of a monthly basis.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

It is worth regularly checking if any visitors are leaving questions on your Google My Business listing. If someone asks a question make sure you answer it and where possible include some of your key words/phrases.

If you are regularly being asked questions it would be worth creating a Google FAQ section on your listing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REVIEWS

Online reviews are becoming more and more important for all business but in particular local businesses as shown in Moz's [2018 Local Search Ranking Factors](#) compiled by [Darren Shaw](#) where it is noticed that the importance of reviews increased by over 17% in the last year and by over 40% in the last three years.

WHY ARE REVIEWS SO IMPORTANT?

Online reviews provide social proof to visitors and the search engines. Google's 3-Pack is an incredibly valuable space for a local business to be listed in – they only want to list the best. With this in mind it is critical every business has a strategy to get more and more highly rated reviews. It used to be possible to be listed in the 3-Pack with just a few reviews, or even no reviews; however, in larger towns and active business sectors you now need a lot and regular reviews.

Review signals have also seen continued growth in importance over last year.

Thematic Signals	2017	2018	Change
Review Signals	13.13%	15.44%	↑ 17.59%

Review signals were 10.8% in 2015, so over the past 3 years, we've seen a 43% increase in the importance of review signals:

Thematic Signals	2015	2017	2018	Change
Review Signals	10.8%	13.13%	15.44%	↑ 42.96%

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

GET MORE REVIEWS

Reviews continue to increase in importance in local search, so, obviously, getting more Google reviews. The difficulty is, this is becoming common knowledge and therefore you need to make sure that you are competing with your competition on review count and lots of high-quality reviews.

KEYWORDS IN REVIEWS

In a perfect world you need to get reviewers to put in your keywords in their review, so rather than just asking for a review, it's useful to ask your customers to mention what service they had provided or whatever so you can get those keywords in your reviews.

Getting keywords in your reviews is a factor that has also risen. In the 2017 survey, this factor ranked #26 in the local pack/finder factors. It is now coming in at #14.

RESPOND TO REVIEWS (reviewers now get notified)

Good or bad it is imperative that you respond to reviews especially as Google recently started notifying reviewers that if the owner has responded to you. Your responses is another signal to Google that you're an engaged business.

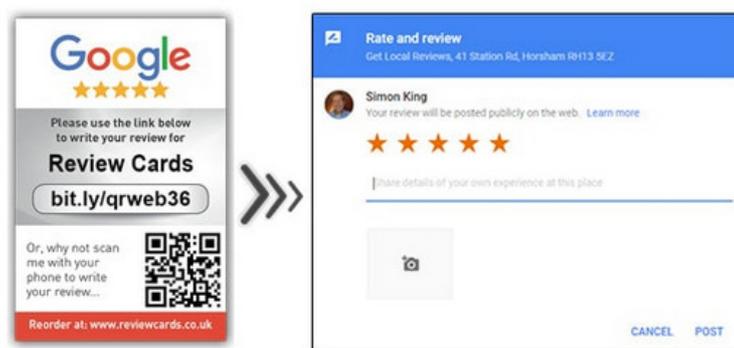
DIVERSIFY BEYOND GOOGLE FOR REVIEWS

Diversify. Don't just focus on Google My Business when thinking about reviews. Look at other sites national sites that allow reviews such as Yell, Facebook, TripAdvisor. In addition, there are industry specific review sites.

You can also find out like what are the sites that your competitors are getting reviews on. Then if you just do a search like keyword plus city, like "lawyers + Denver," you might find sites that are important for your industry as well that you should be listed on. So check out a couple of your keywords and make sure you're getting reviews on more sites than just Google.

REVIEW CARDS – THE EASY WAY TO GET MORE REVIEWS

[Review cards](#) work on the simple principle that when prompted, most satisfied customers will be happy to leave a positive review. However, people forget or can't find where to post the review. Review cards for Google, Trip Advisor, Yell or Facebook take your customer directly to the right place to write your review by using the short URL or QR code.



IN SUMMARY

Three significant factors that rule local SEO and you should always think about them when you are looking at your local optimisation:

1. **Relevance:** does the information you are providing Google fit what the searcher is looking for. Think about your copy, your on-page SEO and the information you are posting in your Google My Business and other citation listings.
2. **Geographical Location:** when Google or Bing display local results, they are either using the devices location to display the correct local business.

If you type in dog walker Google and Bing will assume you want dog walkers near you, unless you put in a geographical location to your search such as “dog walker in Ascot”.

3. **Reviews:** the search engines want to recommend the best and for this reason the best reviewed business are the social proof they need to rank a business highly.

With this in mind there are four things you need ensure your local business has to create the virtuous circle of more and more leads.





If you have any questions about how to get more business leads through Local SEO please feel free to contact us:

Phone: 07870 568189

Email: info@croydonbusinesshub.co.uk

www.croydonbusinesshub.co.uk