

Why Online Marketing Matters to Local Businesses



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Just over a decade ago, when the internet first began changing the way we think about business, it had the effect of bringing companies closer to customers. Suddenly, you didn't have to visit the bookstore down the street. You could order your favorite paperback online, receiving it in just a couple of days from a warehouse. The whole thing was cheaper and more convenient, if a little less personal.

All of this boosted some kinds of companies, and meant danger for certain smaller retailers, but most truly local businesses were unaffected. Customers might buy electronics from the cheapest online store, but they weren't going to download a cappuccino. The digital age was making everything new, but restaurants, hotels, and other service-oriented shops were largely safe to keep going on as they had been for decades.

With time, though, the internet started to change local businesses, too. These changes were so small, at first, that they were easy to miss. More and more, customers started looking for vendors and businesses on Google, rather than using the Yellow Pages. They turned to smartphones and tablets for things like menus, hours, and driving directions rather than making calls. And, they started checking reviews on social media sites and apps before making plans or decisions.

Again, most of these changes didn't feel as dramatic as the initial growth of the internet and ecommerce. But, in some ways they've changed the nature of buying and selling even more. More importantly, because they didn't arrive all at



once, lots of business owners haven't been able to keep up.

The result is a world in which even food trucks need a website and social media presence, where your online reputation is as important as old school word-of-mouth, and where Google, Yelp, and Facebook can all have enormous impacts on your sales... whether you pay much attention to them or not.

...the internet can make or break your business, even if you've been in the neighborhood for decades or even generations.

However, it's also a world in which business owners wonder whether they have websites that are good enough, where many are confused about how to help local customers find them online, and where getting the right reviews and reputation can be a challenge.

If any of these seem familiar to you, this short guide is the answer you've been looking for. The fact of the matter is that the internet can make or break your business, even if you've been in the neighborhood for decades or even generations.

In the coming pages, I'm going to give you a quick, easy, and clear guide to everything you need to know to promote your company to local customers on the web.

Whether you're a new entrepreneur or an experienced business owner, and whether your company only works with local customers or draws buyers from all over, these simple tips can put more money in your pocket and make your life easier all at the same time.

What I Want to Teach You About Local Online Marketing

There's a lot of ground to cover, but I'll be focusing on a few key ideas. These will include:

- What you must have on your website to appeal to local buyers
- Why some websites appear on Google searches for some areas and others don't
- How social media and review sites factor into the mix
- What you can do to encourage local sales and create a "buzz" about your business

As you read through them, I want you to remember that these aren't neat ideas I picked up from a blog post somewhere – they're proven principles I've used to help dozens of companies just like yours. As an entrepreneur myself, and the owner of a web design and online marketing company, I know what it takes to use the internet to bring customers through your front door. In this brief ebook, I'm going to share the secrets with you without any unnecessary buzzwords or BS.

If that sounds good to you, let's jump in!

How Do You Find Local Customers Online?

If you are new to the idea of greeting local buyers or even walk-in visitors to your company through the internet, you're going to love this short guide. That's because I'm going to give you a handful of easy, straightforward, and cost-effective tips you can use to generate phone calls, appointments, and retail sales.



You might be wondering how all of this is going to happen. What can a business do to attract local buyers on the web?

I'll be going into more detail in the coming sections, of course, but let's begin with a quick overview of the steps involved...

You Start With Your Business Website – having a great website helps with any form of online marketing, of course, but there are certain aspects to your pages and content that are particularly important to local buyers. I'll show you how to make it easy to find your company in the real world, and to increase the odds that someone will pick up the phone or stop by your location.

Next, You Get Visible on Google and the Other Search Engines – in most places, the Yellow Pages just aren't that widely used anymore. Instead, customers turn to Google's search listings, or a voice assistant on their phone, to find businesses and resources they need. I'm going to show you how to make your business more prominent in those search results.

Then I'll Show You the Importance of NAPS – these are the small details that can make or break your company when it comes to online visibility. NAPS are crucial, but you definitely don't want to sleep on them.

I'll Touch on the Power of Online Ads – did you know that you can stand out to local buyers on Google, Facebook, and other platforms for just a few dollars a day? In a lot of businesses, just a small local online advertising budget can pay off in a big way.

Finally, We'll Explore Social Media and Online Reviews – word-of-mouth advertising has gone digital, and it can have a huge effect on your visibility and sales potential. I'll show you what to pay attention to, and how to use your accounts and profiles profitably.

There is a lot of information here, but I promise none of it will be technical or overwhelming. *Let's get started!*



Setting Up Your Website for Local Marketing

In the world of online marketing, everything starts with having a great website. That's true whether you want to attract customers from across the globe or just down the street.

There are couple of reasons your business website needs to be top-notch. For one thing, when people go to check out your company online, they are highly likely to click through to your home page (and possibly do a bit of digging after that). If what they find doesn't impress them, or make your business seem professional and credible, you might not get a second chance to get that customer.

Also, as we'll see in the next section, Google and the other search engines use important clues on your website to determine whether or not you are a good match for individual users. If you want customers to find you, it helps to have the right look and layout.

Of course, you probably already know your website is important. Otherwise, you wouldn't be taking the time to read a guide like this one. So, let's get to a few things you have to remember about your website if you want local customers to flock to your business...

Remember the Five Second Rule

No, not the one that says you can pick up chips off the carpet and eat them if you do it fast enough. The five second rule I'm referring to is the one that states you have that amount of time, or less, to impress a first-time visitor to your website and ensure they understand what your company is all about.

In other words, someone who hasn't seen your website in the past should be able to grasp who you are, what you do, and where you're located almost immediately. If your layout, pictures, or images add confusion to any of those issues, you're going to lose the attention of some buyers before you have a chance to convince them to work with you.

If anything, recent studies show that five seconds is a long amount of time for a new website visitor to look through your pages and content. So, if you need to improve or refresh your website to make things more clear, that should be your first step.

Emphasize Your Location

If attracting local customers is your priority, then you should emphasize your area of operation throughout your website. Use your city, state, or neighborhood name in titles and headings. Mention on your home page where you work, or which areas you serve. Point out each office or location you have.

By making a point of showing off your geography, you give visitors a very easy frame of reference to see whether you are close to them. Just as importantly, you signal to Google and the other search engines where your business is at in a geographic sense. As we'll see, that's massively important when it comes to bringing buyers to your front door when they are on the go or looking for convenient options nearest to wherever they happen to be at the moment.

Along with city and neighborhood names, don't forget you can incorporate your phone number, zip code, and nearby landmarks into the text on your website.

It's also smart to have driving directions posted prominently if that's how customers get to you. These are all convenient for customers, and give you more scannable text that Google can use to pick up on your location.

Encourage Phone Calls or Walk-in Visits

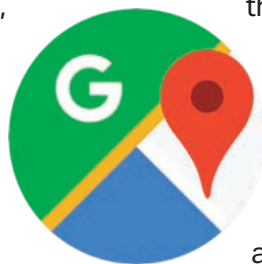
As a society, we've gotten more used to communicating with businesses through emails and online chats. When we're working with local companies, though, we often want to see someone face-to-face, or at least hear their voice.

You can take advantage of this fact, and give your local marketing a boost, by simply encouraging people to call and/or stop by on your website. Every one of your pages should have some sort of clear call to action. Why not make it something that is a little more personal than an email or contact form?

Phone calls and in-person meetings can sometimes be more convenient for your buyers. Also, they help you to foster a sense of familiarity with clients, which can be important not just to winning the first sale, but to growing relationships and holding onto that business for years to come. Having your phone number on your website clickable, makes it easy for people to call right from your site.

Show Off Your Team and Location with Photos

Images are important to web design for a lot of reasons. For one thing, they connect with visitors more emotionally than simple text does. The human mind is actually built to process visuals thousands of times faster than text. So, if you want people to feel a certain way about your company, it's a good idea to reinforce that with photos.



Going a little further, having high-quality photos on your website gives a buyer who hasn't worked with you before a sense of familiarity with your team or location. You'll seem like less of an unknown, which is inherently "safer" psychologically than working with someone you haven't seen before. Also, if your team seems friendly, and your office or facility looks clean, that encourages buyers stop by. And finally, by posting images of your location online, you will actually make it easier for customers to find you in the real world.

A couple of things need to be mentioned about photos, though. The first is the quality of your pictures matters. You want to share a sense of positivity, quality, and competence. That's easier with high-res images than it is grainy snapshots.

While working with a professional photographer might be ideal, it's not the only way to get good pictures. Today's iPhones and Androids take wonderful shots. Add some good lighting and you can capture your face, your storefront, or even flowers in your window with great clarity and color.

The other word of caution with photos is that you absolutely must use images you own or have the rights to. In the past, I've had clients who downloaded pictures from Google searches and used them on their websites or social accounts. Then, they were sued for copyright infringement. You might think no one will notice if you use a couple of "borrowed" stock images or pretty pictures for your tiny company, but you would be wrong.

Businesses employ sophisticated tracking tools to find when their rights are being infringed upon. If they sue you, the attorneys involved won't be satisfied with



Lots of local customers use mobile devices. If your website loads very slowly, or doesn't look right on the small screen, they are going to take their time and money elsewhere.

letting you just take the photos down. You'll end up in court or paying fines. Either way it won't be cheap.

The bottom line: use pictures you own. You don't have to spend a lot of time or money getting them, especially when customers love "candid" snapshots taken in the moment.

Pay Attention to Three Technical Details

I promised not to get into any technical details in this short guide, and I intend to keep my word. However, there are three aspects of your web design that you need to be aware of, even if you're never involved in the coding yourself.

Specifically, you have to know that your website is:

- Fast, with quick page loading speeds
- Responsive, so it displays correctly on phones and tablets
- Fully-functional, with no missing pages or plug-ins

Lots of local customers use mobile devices. If your website loads very slowly, or doesn't look right on the small screen, they are going to take their time and money elsewhere. And, all three of these factors are search signals, which means you could disappear from Google's listings – which I want you to remember currently make up around 5 billion searches per day.

You don't have to look after these details yourself, just know they are important and discuss them with your web designer.

Is Your Website Setup for Local Marketing?

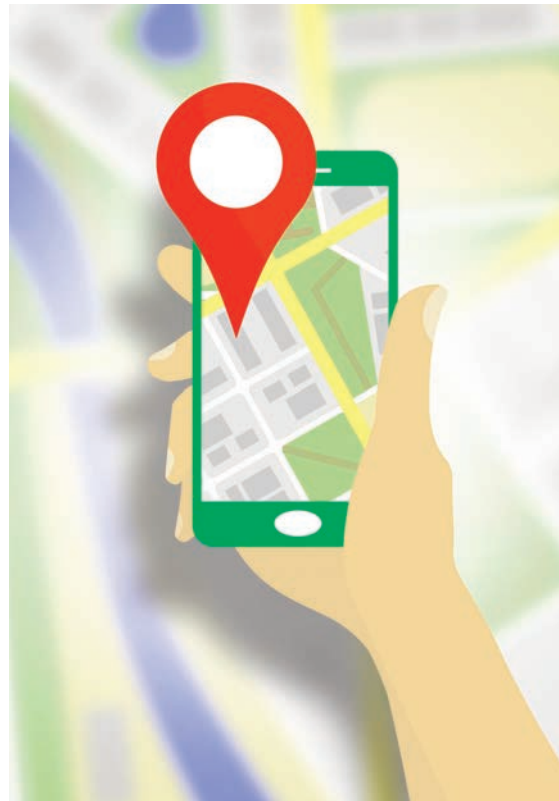
I could fill an entire ebook 10 times as long as this one with just web design tips and advice, of course, but these guidelines are enough to get you started. Cover the basics and you'll have what you need to attract and impress buyers in your area.

Don't move on until you know you've got these issues covered. Once you do, we can move on to the topic of setting optimizing your pages for local search visibility.

Helping Local Customers to Find Your Website on Google

I suppose it's theoretically still possible to run a business without getting any customers from Google, if you were already known amongst customers in your area, but it would certainly be difficult. For a brand new company, I think it would be next to impossible.

That's because, as I've already mentioned and you already know, the world's largest search engine effectively killed off the Yellow Pages and several other forms of traditional local advertising in the past



decade. Even most "word-of-mouth" advertising is now shared through digital mediums. Your friends and contacts don't slip a recommendation down on a piece of paper anymore; they text, email you a link or ask their Facebook friends.

Knowing all of that, it's easy to see why your business has to rank well on Google and the other search engines if you want to have new buyers from your area coming to you. Luckily, improving your search visibility locally is simple and cost-effective. You won't have to break your marketing budget or spend hours every week working at it.

That's not the same as saying that local search visibility will take care of itself, though. Let's look at what you have to know and do...

How Search Engines Match Users to Local Businesses

Several years ago, the programmers at Google noticed that nearly a quarter of all user searches were for a business, service, or product that would be found in a specific area or neighborhood. This was sometimes obvious by the choice of wording (i.e., "restaurant near me"), or exact keyword terms (like "East Peoria Illinois web designer.")

In subsequent years, those percentages rose more and more, to the point that some industry experts think that nearly *half* of all searches have a geographic component. Realizing that factoring location into its search algorithm could help improve search results and keep Google as the tool of choice for billions of people, they tweaked their formula to match searchers to companies in the same areas.

The result is a system that automatically incorporates geography into any query that would likely be for a retail business or local resource.

Understanding this is crucial for small and medium -sized companies. It's why a local coffee shop can appear in Google's listings before a Starbucks, even though the latter has thousands of locations and multi-billion-dollar marketing budgets. You can compete with bigger competitors, and even giant retail chains, and come out ahead. That's the beauty of local search visibility.

For that to happen, though, Google and the other search engines have to be able to understand where you are. And, real-world customers have to find you.



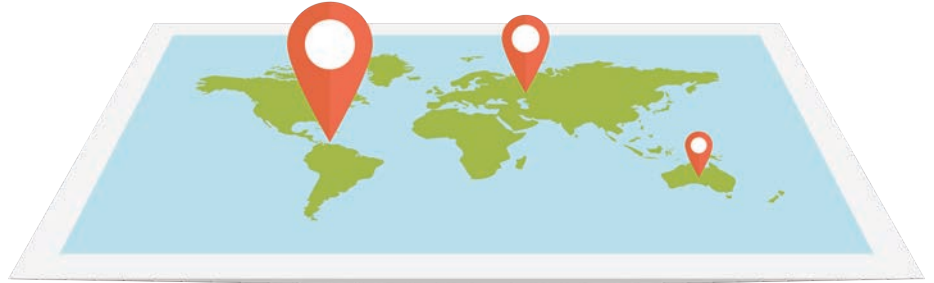
Using Geographical Content

Like web design, search engine optimization (or SEO) is a massive topic that could fill many e-books. However, we are going to distill down the basics here so you know what you need to bring local buyers to your website.

Essentially, Google uses automated software that crawls the internet and "reads" pages to see what they are about. It's looking for a lot of things, but especially business names, industries or categories, and locations. So, if it arrives at my website and sees that I'm an "East Peoria Illinois web designer," it knows that someone looking for that service is probably a good match for my site.

In this way, Google can match you up with your perfect customers, but only if it understands where you are. That brings us back to a point I made about your website: you should have several different indicators of your location online. Mention your city name, your street name, the state or province you're in, and possibly even your neighborhood or a nearby landmark if those are relevant. All of these give Google clues about where you are.

Another way to emphasize your location is by making sure you have consistent contact details throughout your site and all your online profiles, something I'll explain in more detail in the next section.



You don't have to go overboard using your city name in every sentence on your website, of course, but be aware that these types of geographic keywords matter. A good web designer can help you to find the terms and phrases that best explain your company and location to customers, and then put them in the right places on your pages.

Use Maps and Supporting Location Details

Working geographic terms into your website is a good start, but I always advise my clients to go farther. You want to have maps, driving directions, and phone numbers in an easy-to-find place. You might even consider creating a link on your contact page using Google's own tools so someone on a smart phone can get directions from where they happen to be, right to your front door.

All of this is helpful from a search visibility perspective, of course, but more than that it encourages local customers to come and actually find you. Ultimately, that's the name of the game. Having a good search engine spot is only useful if it turns into real business. So, do everything you can to get someone from that first visit to the point where they are picking up the phone, looking at you face-to-face, or spending money in your store.

For that matter, even though it doesn't really apply technically to the world of online marketing, I suggest improving your signage and storefront to be as visible and inviting

as possible. It won't help your Google ranking, but it can help you make the most of it.

When Are You Open?

It might seem like a small detail, but make sure your hours of operation are accurate and up-to-date. Otherwise, you could lose business or anger the customers you already have.

Recently, one of my clients told me a story that really drives this point home. He was on Google looking for directions to a medical eye center across town. He noted that the business was open on Saturday, which was convenient for him since he was busy running a company through the week, and the business was pretty far out of his way.

When he took the time to visit on the weekend, though, the shop was closed. It turned out the owners had changed the hours at one point but neglected to change their information on their Google Business page. My client was so mad about his wasted time his face was still turning red when he told me about it weeks later. Imagine how many customers might never return after an experience like that. Even worse, imagine how many of them might post bad reviews online (something I'll get to shortly).

Be open when you say you are, and make sure it's easy for customers to tell when you aren't.

Making Your Website Easy to Find

It's easy to go overboard with search engine optimization but you don't need a lot of advanced analytics to ensure that your location and business type go together in a few important places on your pages. Do that and you'll find it's much, much easier for buyers in your area to arrive at your beautiful and functional website.

It would be nice if those were your only search visibility concerns. As it turns out, though, you have to make sure that what's posted about your company online is current, accurate, and consistent. Let's move on to the next topic and see how you can do exactly that.

It's NAP Time for Your Business

There is a concept that is crucially important to businesses that want local customers. It's incredibly simple, and yet easy to miss or overlook. By getting it wrong, you can literally cost yourself tens of thousands of dollars per year.

What is this hidden detail that makes or breaks so many sales? Whether or not you take NAP time frequently enough.

I don't mean that kind of nap (although I can tell you from experience that online marketing is easier with a full night's rest). Instead, I'm referring to *Name, Address, and Phone Number*.

Is Your NAPS Info Consistent?

Obviously, you know the contact details for your business inside and out... but does the internet? If someone goes on Google looking for your business, or a business that does what yours does, will



they find accurate and up-to-date ways to find you? Will the information

for each location you operate from be clearly listed?

Let's take that question a little further. What happens when a potential customer goes to their favorite industry website or review site looking for the products or services you offer? Will what they see on Yelp match the information on the web version of the Yellow Pages? Will each of these sites – not to mention Facebook, Google Business, and your Better Business Bureau profile – all agree about your address, hours, etc.?

More often than not, the answer to that question is "no" for a lot of small businesses. That's because most business owners don't really look after their NAPs. They have a lot of contact information out there, but some of it is outdated, shortened, or attributed to another company.

This is problematic for several reasons. One is simple and straightforward: you definitely want buyers who are looking for you by name to be able to locate you in the real world. In some cases, referrals might be passed along without a business card or complete contact details. If

someone searches you on Google and can't find the best way to reach you, the opportunity to win them as a customer could be lost before you even notice it was there in the first place.

Likewise, industry websites, local business directories, and review pages can all be wonderful sources of referrals. Suppose you have a dog grooming shop and a customer is looking for a place to have their furry best friend cleaned up. If they see lots of happy feedback for your company on Yelp and call to make an appointment only to find the number they've been given has been disconnected, how likely do you think you are to get that person's business?

And finally, there is an internet marketing component to this issue. Google and the other search engines use a multiple verifying approach to disseminating information. That means they collect important corroborating details – like names, addresses, and phone numbers – from multiple sources. If one resource gives out a given piece of information and another disagrees, that causes problems. The entry is marked as unreliable, and it can cause a company to disappear from local search listings altogether.

If that happens to your business, companies with lesser profiles, worse reviews, and longer drive times can get customers who were meant for you. And, it all happens because you didn't look after NAP time.

Making NAPs Easy

With the right tools in place, you can update Name, Address, and Phone details easily. I should know – I don't just manage it for clients, but also had to change my own not long ago.

My business, Web Tech Services, had been located in the same part of East Peoria, Illinois for more than a decade. Existing customers and referrals knew exactly where to find us. We would probably still be there except one day the owner of our building announced he wanted to sell the property. Suddenly, we had to find a new place to work.

If someone goes on Google looking for your business, or a business that does what yours does, will they find accurate and up-to-date ways to find you?

Relocating the business was hectic, but one saving grace was that we were able to update our NAPs info with my online tools. That way, customers who hadn't heard about the sudden switch – along with business owners who were just learning about us for the first time – had no problem finding us even as we were still unpacking boxes. The process of updating Google's listings, along with our other online info, was quick and seamless.

Things could have been much worse if we didn't have access to those tools or weren't paying close attention. With 10 years of NAPs data online, moving to a new building could have derailed our sales and marketing, not to mention our online reputation. As it turned out, keeping our info current was the easiest part of the move.

Save Your Effort With NAPs

The worst part about missing out on new business because of NAP problems is that it's so easy to avoid. You don't have to manually submit your business contact information to every website or directory where you want your company to be listed. Neither do you have to take the time to look through them, one-by-one, to ensure they are accurate on a weekly or monthly basis. Your web designer has automated software that can handle this for you at a price that's less than you spend on donuts for your team. In fact, the same systems can help you manage your online reputation, too, by alerting you to new testimonials and reviews as they arrive.

No matter how you stay on top of the details, though, it's important that you don't let inaccurate or outdated NAPS information cost you business. It's easy to confuse Google and real-life customers by making your company hard to reach. And, it's just as easy to set things up so you don't have to worry about buyers missing you.

So what are some of the review websites that make it imperative to keep your NAPS updated? Start with GoogleMyBusiness. Google has several websites that keep your address on file, Google Maps, Google Local, Google My Business – who can keep up? There are approximately 70+ sites that show your NAP information to visitors.

Here are some of the popular websites to check your NAPS:

✓ Yelp	✓ TomTom	✓ Printcom	✓ EZLocal
✓ White Pages	✓ Superpages	✓ Local.com	✓ Facebook
✓ Yahoo!	✓ ShowMeLocal	✓ InsiderPages	✓ eLocal
✓ Waze	✓ Merchant Circle	✓ Kudzu	✓ Bing
✓ Yellow Pages	✓ MapQuest	✓ Google+	✓ Apple
✓ Where to?	✓ LocalPages	✓ Foursquare	✓ CitySearch
✓ USCity	✓ LocalStack	✓ DexKnows	✓ 2findlocal
✓ Topix	✓ LocalDatabase	✓ CitySquares	✓ AirYell

Remember there are hundreds of these websites so it's best to search for your company information at each website. A Google search for your company name probably won't be sufficient.

Using Online Ads to Find Local Customers

As a rule of thumb, most of the business owners I know prefer using organic search engine optimization – that is, just having their websites appear in search listings – over paying for ads that will run on search engines or social media sites. However, I'm a firm believer that internet advertising definitely has its place. While it's true you can waste money on Google and Facebook ads, it's also true that you can spend a few dollars a day and find customers who never would've located you otherwise.

That's true for virtually any type of business, but it's especially relevant when you're trying to find local buyers. That's because pay-per-click ads get even less expensive when you're only targeting certain areas or zip codes. You have fewer competitors in a local market, and will generally get bigger results. Even online, customers prefer companies that are just down the road to those they've never heard of.

Additionally, you can use online ads to test ideas quickly and efficiently. Improving your local search visibility organically takes time, but an ad campaign can be up-and-running in just a couple of hours.

With all of that in mind, here's how you can make the most of online advertising to boost your business with buyers in your city...

Pay Close Attention to Your Account Settings

Most web designers know at least a handful of clients who have horror stories about online advertising campaigns that quickly burned budgets and got out of control. And, many of those can be traced back to accounts and campaigns that were improperly configured.

Google and Facebook both give you a high degree of control over who you want your ads shown to. It only takes a few minutes, but it's imperative that you go through the settings and make sure they match your preferences. Obviously, you'll want to adjust your ads so they're only being shown in certain areas or neighborhoods if you are focusing on local buyers. Also, you might want to tweak settings for language, time of day, and device type. You'll certainly want to ensure your daily budget doesn't go over the amount you're comfortable with.

By taking the time to configure each of these, you can ensure that you aren't wasting any money advertising to buyers who are outside your area of operation. You'll also be left with a much tighter and more efficient ad structure that you can turn on or off at any time.



Focus Tightly on Your Target Audience

Naturally, not everyone who lives in your area is a good fit for what you have to offer. So, when you create your first campaign, be very specific about whom you want to market to. Whether you're targeting searchers by keyword on Google, or zeroing in on a particular demographic through Facebook, you should be as narrow as you reasonably can in your advertising.

The easiest way to waste money on internet ads is to show your messages to people who are never going to be interested. It's much better to get a dozen clicks to your website each day from prospects who are perfect for your product or service than it is to get charged for hundreds of clicks from buyers who might not have much real sales potential, especially over the long term.

Some marketers do a better job of working within this reality than others. For example, one of my clients owns a dog day care facility. I worked with her to ensure her Facebook ads target people who have dogs. It wouldn't make a lot of sense to market her business to people without canines for pets, would it?

At the same time, I have another friend who gets angry when she sees ads for dating websites pop up on her Facebook feed. She doesn't *want* to date anyone right now, but Facebook doesn't know that and the matchmaking companies haven't figured it out. They just see from her profile and browsing activity that she is single, lives in a nice part of town, and enjoys high-end clothing. To advertisers, the easy assumption is that she's single and has money to spend. In other words, what they consider to be the perfect prospect for a dating site!

The moral of this story is that you can never be too careful about zeroing down on your perfect buyer. Google and Facebook ads don't cost a lot, but there's no reason to waste an extra cent on marketing to the wrong people if you don't have to.

Take a little time to think about who your target audience is when placing ads. Sometimes it's harder to figure out than a dog day care or a CPA looking for small

business people. Write down some ideas or look at your customer list and research what they do for a living and where they are located. It really helps to know your target audience before placing your ads.

Emphasize Location in Your Ads

Google ads come in a lot of shapes and varieties, but most newer marketers are going to focus on simple text ads. If you are running a campaign that is triggered when a searcher enters a certain phrase or query into Google, then make sure your message mentions the area you are located in. That will often be enough to catch their eye and pique their interest.

You can do the same thing on Facebook. You can use a geographic visual, or text over your image, to show potential customers you are close by. This can be even more powerful in a social stream, as lots of users will tune out anything that doesn't immediately grab their interest. Many will scroll over ads without ever focusing on them, but will notice a business that's just down the road.

Consider experimenting with both search and social ads, and developing different campaigns for individual locations or neighborhoods. Over time, you'll find what works best for you, and could develop a solid stream of new business for just a few dollars each week.

How to Build Your Local Online Advertising Campaigns

I might be a web designer and online marketing personality, but I'm also a business owner myself. So, when I approach a new project, I like to put myself in a client's shoes. That almost always leads me to recommend beginning any ad campaign on two principles: using a small budget and looking for an immediate response.

You shouldn't take a huge whack out of your marketing budget to run your first few online ads. Make sure they are working first, and that you're getting a predictable response.

That response, by the way, should be measurable. Use your ads to invite searchers or social browsers to use a coupon, make an appointment, or try a free sample. These are all steps that could quickly lead to more revenue, and give you results that are easy to tally. Many companies waste money on expensive "branding and awareness" campaigns. That's fine if you want to see profits someday, but I like to set up online ads that pay off in days instead of years.

Keep Tweaking Your Internet Ads

The great thing about running Google and Facebook ads to find local customers is that it won't cost you much and will probably pay off pretty quickly. However, no matter how good your initial results are, I would encourage you to evaluate response rates, test new ideas, and measure your ROI at regular intervals.

The great thing about online ad campaigns is that they can always be improved. And, unlike print marketing pieces, internet ads can be adjusted or placed at a moment's notice. You simply change or text or upload a new picture; you don't have to work with weeks of lead time to try something new.

Take advantage of that by always testing, experimenting, and trying new markets or messages. Over time you might be able



The great thing about online ad campaigns is that they can always be improved.

to double or triple the sales you get from every dollar you spend.

Online Ads Work for Local Customers

By now, I hope you understand that online ads don't have to be expensive, and they can be a great tool to help you bring in buyers in your local area.

You could take what you know about local marketing and how it applies to web design, search visibility, and online ads to grow your sales significantly. There is one more topic we have to address before we wrap up this short guide, however. It has to do with your online reputation and social presence.

Word-of-mouth advertising has always been the strongest form of marketing. Let's see how that works in the digital age...

Tying Your Local Marketing Together With Social Media and Online Reviews

According to a study by Forbes, 9 out of every 10 customers will look at online reviews before they visit a business or spend their money. That means 90% of your sales are influenced by the feedback of previous customers.

That statistic sometimes feels like a shocking one to the business owners I work with, but it probably shouldn't be. When was the last time you checked out a new restaurant, or bought something from an online store, without seeing what other buyers thought first?

The topic of online reputation management – making the most of your profiles and reviews – is so important that I [once wrote an entire book](#) on the subject. In this section, I'm going to break down some of the basics, and in particular, mention how social media and online reviews factor into your local marketing efforts...

The New Digital Word of Mouth

Word-of-mouth advertising has always been the strongest form of promotion. People might not trust you, but they *do* trust what other customers like themselves have to say about your business, your prices, and your service.

In the old days, referrals and recommendations were passed at networking meetings, and in churches or restaurants. Today, though, most reviews are spread through industry websites, social media portals, and local resources like Yelp, Angie's List or TripAdvisor.

The upshot here is that having lots of



great feedback and testimonials on these sites can do wonderful things for your business. Conversely, having a poor or nonexistent online review can hurt you in a lot of ways. Would you rather have 90% of all new buyers see other customers saying good things about your business or find an endless number of complaints?

Your Online Reputation Starts with Complete Profiles

If you want to enjoy a strong reputation amongst local buyers, then your business has to be visible in all the right places. That means setting up an account that's strictly for your company on Facebook. It also means ensuring you have an updated entry on Yelp, and a Google Business Profile. If there are important websites in your industry, you'll want to have entries on those pages, too.

The operative words here are *accurate* and *updated*. Remember the advice I gave in the section on NAPS. If customers can't find you, they aren't going to buy from you.

Each of these profiles gives a buyer a convenient place they can login and say good things about your business. It's also worth mentioning once again that every profile or entry for your business has value as a source of referrals and search engine-friendly content.

Know and Follow Your Reputation

Because your online reputation is so important to your business, it's imperative you keep tabs on what customers are saying. In some cases, that might mean checking out your reviews on Yelp or Google Business each week. However, I prefer my clients use automated tools for reputation management.

There are lots of small apps and software packages available (you can find them online or through your web designer) that help you to update NAPS as needed *and* see when a customer has posted a new review about your business. These are simple and effective while costing next to nothing.

However you choose to do it, though, it's important that you not leave your online reputation to chance. It's the one part of your marketing plan that can multiply the impact of everything you do or kill sales opportunities before they ever develop. You don't want to simply hope for good reviews... or be surprised by bad ones.

Managing Your Review Profile

While some business owners simply watch reviews for their products and services add up, I like to be more proactive. Certainly, the most important thing you can do to generate positive feedback is provide good service or quality products at fair prices. Do that, and a lot of buyers will praise your company because they've become fans.

Still, some individuals are far more likely to leave reviews than others. That's because some people make a habit of leaving reviews for everything while others

rarely do so. It's also the case that an unhappy customer is many times more likely to say something online than someone who feels they have gotten satisfactory service for years. Lots of people simply don't feel compelled to speak up until or unless something has gone wrong.

Knowing this, you should always encourage your best customers to leave positive reviews for your company on whichever sites they like, or that you think will have the biggest impact. Just think of what testimonials from your dozen favorite customers or clients would do for your ability to win business from *other* people just like them.

Another good idea is to respond to all the reviews you get online, positive or negative. When buyers pass along their compliments, thank them for their kind words. If someone has a complaint, criticism, or suggestion, let them know you've heard it and will strive to do better. Most business owners won't take the time to do this, but it shows you care and you're plugged in to your market.

Of course, there is always the chance that some of your reviews are going to be overwhelmingly negative. Don't fret about that too much – it happens to the best of us. See if there is anything you can do to correct the problem or make the customer happy. Then, respond to the review politely and professionally and move on.



In rare cases, you might even be able to have a negative online review taken away. That's because, contrary to what you may have heard once, sometimes the customer really *is* wrong.

Believe it or not, I have helped some of my clients to do away with feedback that people accidentally left for the wrong company. For instance, one of my clients is a music venue. He was distraught when he learned a guest had written a scathing one-star review on the venue's Facebook page complaining about a concert that had been held at *another* facility downtown. We asked him to revise his comments given that the artist in question had never played at the location he left a review for. He was happy to revise his thoughts based on this new information. And even if he hadn't been willing to edit his review, at least other customers would have seen the owner was willing to work with them accommodate their concerns.

Another client of mine supervises a mental health facility. One day, she discovered a malicious review in which the person claimed to have called with a suicide threat and was told to "go ahead." The facility managers were shocked, and quickly determined no one had ever heard of the person who left the fake review. They conveyed this information in a public response.

This just goes to reinforce that it's always important to tell your side of the story. Imagine the way things would have looked if my client hadn't responded and viewers assumed the story was true. They might not know why someone went out of their way to leave malicious and untrue feedback, but at least they were able to stop it from going unanswered.

Don't let these stories scare you, though. One bad review here or there isn't going



to sink your business. In fact, it could even turn out to be a good thing, if it helps you to sharpen some part of your products, policies, or employee training procedures to help you serve customers more effectively in the future. Besides, what new buyers want to see is a general trend of positive reviews. One outlier here or there won't deter them from calling or visiting your company.

The Power of a Strong Online Reputation

I've only given you a very brief overview of online reputation management in this short section, but I want to be sure you understand just how powerful it can be.

When customers are looking for certain type of product or service, they'll tend to find the businesses that have the most reviews. After all, those listings are popular points of discussion with lots of searchable content on Yelp and Google Business. The more reviews you have, the more visible you become to buyers.

Over time, the reviews themselves tend to be self-reinforcing. When customers are saying great things about you, more people are encouraged to give you a shot. Also, buyers come to you with the



notion that they are going to be pleased with what you have to offer because everyone else was, too. Before long, your sales are growing and growing.

The opposite can also happen. A handful of particularly sharp reviews – particularly ones that are unaccompanied by responses from a business owner or manager – can paint a really negative picture. When new customers see them, they don't want to give the company the benefit of the doubt, so they take their business elsewhere. Sales decline no matter how much marketing the business tries, leading to a vicious cycle that doesn't improve until feedback gets better.

The internet has taught a lot of people to be very skeptical. That makes word-of-mouth advertising more important than ever. That's the basis of online reputation management, and it can make or break your company with local buyers.

Are You Ready to Get More Local Customers Through Your Website?

I often get the feeling, when speaking with business owners, that they come into our work together with the impression that online marketing has to be difficult, expensive, and technical. It certainly *can* be all of those things, but it's not necessary – particularly if your goal is to attract buyers from your local area.

When you shrink down the giant internet to the sphere of people who are looking for your products and services in the city or state where you work, things get a lot more manageable. You don't need a giant website, just a good one. Your ads don't have to run everywhere, just be shown to the buyers who best match your products or services. And, you don't have to worry about all of the competitors in your industry, just the ones who are within driving distance.

Remember that and local online marketing gets much easier and more affordable. It takes a lot of the stress out of the process. If you have a great website, content that explains what you do and where you are, and a simple campaign that includes targeted ads and review monitoring, you are well ahead of most of your colleagues.

I wanted to end this short guide with that reminder because you really can manage small-scale online marketing efforts with 15 or 30 minutes a day. If that's too much, though, or you want bigger results, then I encourage you to seek out a creative partner who can help.

In my business, I work with a lot of people who never thought the internet would be a major source of leads or sales for them. After a few months, though, they wonder how they ever got by without all of the customers that come to them through Google, their website, and a Facebook business page. They are amazed at how little it costs, in terms of time and money, to get big results.

This isn't an advertisement for me and my company – although I would love to work with you no matter where you are located. Instead, it's meant to be a reminder that

you don't have to manage all the aspects of sales and marketing in the digital age on your own. Neither do you have to spend a fortune to get expert advice from an experienced team.

The most successful business owners I know are involved with their websites and learned the basics from guides like this one. However, they tend to outsource or supplement a lot of their online marketing legwork simply because they don't have the time or attention to devote to the details.

Whether you do it on your own or with the help of a professional, though, I hope you'll put the simple pieces of advice I've given you to work. Local online marketing works, and it can transform your sales and marketing efforts. Go back and re-read any of the sections if you need to and then create a written plan to move ahead. Once you put it into action and start seeing the results, I hope you'll contact me to share your success story.

Thank you for taking the time to read this ebook. I hope you've found it worthwhile and can tell you from experience that you have what you need to get going. I wish you the best with your local marketing efforts!

