

Citation Cleanup: Assessing the Damage, Estimating Your Project Timeline



Citation Cleanup: Assessing the Damage, Estimating Your Project Timeline

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Executive summary

Plot incoming clients' citation cleanup needs with convenience and speed on 15 of the most important platforms.

It's a common scenario — the phone rings and you're speaking with a brand new potential client seeking professional assistance with their Local SEO. The client lets you know that they've operated a sporting goods store for 12 years in Albuquerque, NM and that they moved to a new location a year ago. The owner feels he should be doing better in Google's pack rankings for his core terms and is struggling to understand how to gain visibility for his secondary keywords. He's read up a bit on the subject, but he's a busy man and lack of time for further education is his main motivation for reaching out to you.

Almost everything at this stage is an unknown, and before you begin your agency's formal audit process, some quick data will help you make an initial assessment of the type of work that may be ahead of you if you accept this business as a new client.

Initial discovery

Your initial chat with the owner surfaces a very important fact: the business has recently moved. The first thing you wonder about is citation consistency — the presence of correct NAP+W (name, address, phone number + website) everywhere the business is referenced across the web.

Inconsistent NAP is a double-pronged negative, leading to confusion for both customers and search engines. It can misdirect humans and sap the trust search engines have in the validity of the business' data. Citation cleanup has become a cornerstone of most Local SEO service offerings because of the importance of NAP consistency.

Before you get off the phone, before you send out your in-depth client questionnaire, you can use tools to gain a snapshot image of the incoming client's NAP consistency. For this study, we've selected a recently relocated business at random and are using the free Moz Check Listing tool for a speedy assessment of NAP health.

Performing a citation health quick check

1) Find the business's listing

We start at <https://moz.com/local/search> and enter the business name and zip code the client provides. In this case, the business is currently located at **6650 Holly Ave NE Albuquerque, NM 87113**, but they were previously located at **12611 Montgomery Blvd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87111**.

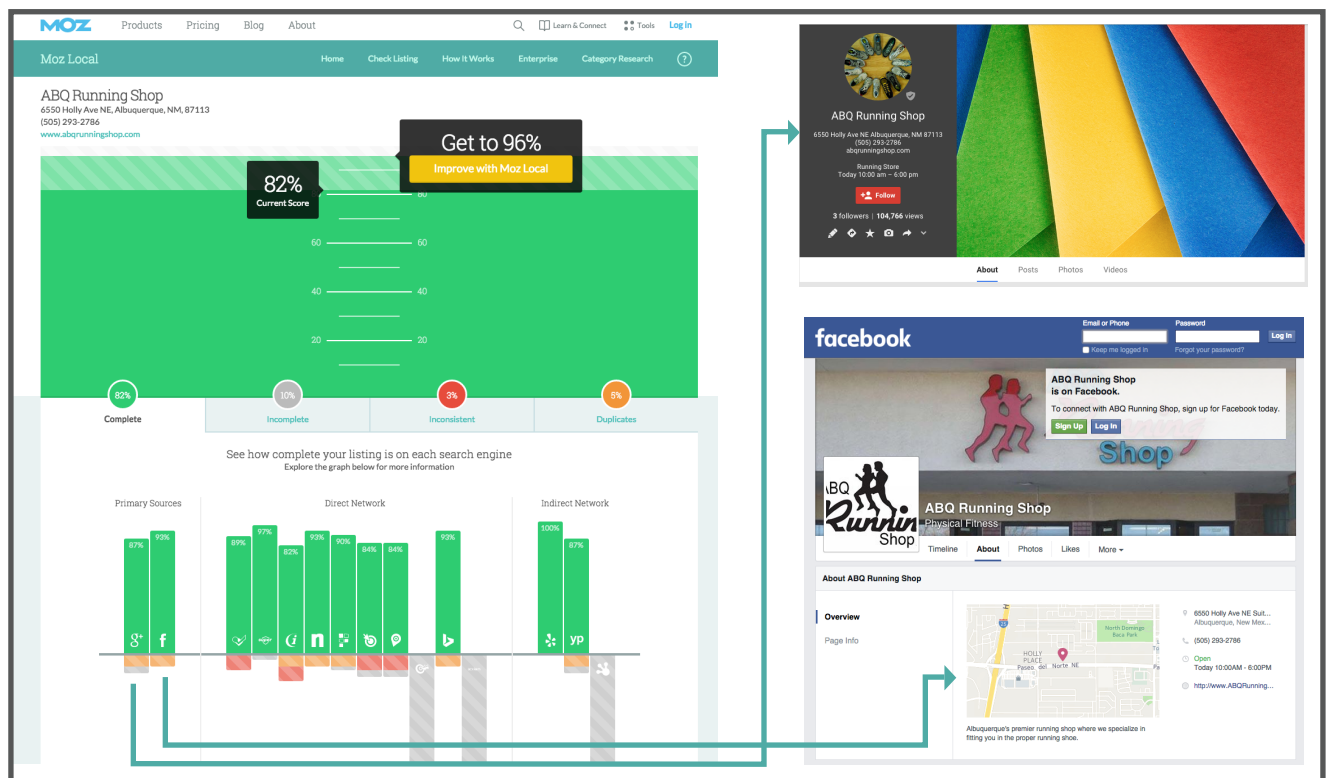
The screenshot shows the Moz Local 'Check Listing' tool. The header includes the Moz logo and navigation links: Products, Pricing, Blog, About, Learn & Connect, Tools, and Log In. The main navigation bar has links for Home, Check Listing (active), How It Works, Enterprise, and Category Research. The page content asks 'Can your customers find you online?' and instructs the user to check listings on Google, Bing, and other local search engines. There are two input fields: one for the business name 'ABQ Running Shop' and one for the zip code '87113'. A yellow 'Check my Listing' button is next to the zip code field. Below the input fields, it says 'Choose the most accurate listing'. There are two listing results shown, both marked as 'Verified'. The first listing is for 'ABQ Running Shop' at '6550 Holly Ave NE, Albuquerque, NM, 87113' with phone number '(505) 293-2786'. The second listing is for 'ABQ Running Shop' at '12611 Montgomery Blvd NE, Albuquerque, NM, 87111' with the same phone number.

Performing a citation health quick check (continued)

In less than five seconds, you've turned up both the new and the old location, each of them marked as verified. This indicates that there is some sort of issue with either the Google My Business listing page or the Facebook Place (which this tool uses as sources for verified NAP listings). The presence of the old NAP immediately signals that any citation cleanup efforts that have been made thus far by the business have not been complete. **You've learned, almost instantly, that this is a business you can help.**

2) Investigate the incorrect data

You click through on the first of the two possible verified options:



You click on the green bars representing the Google My Business listing and the Facebook Place for the business.

NAP on the Google My Business listing reads:

ABQ Running Shop
6550 Holly Ave NE
Albuquerque, NM 87113
(505) 293-2786
abqrunningshop.com

NAP on the Facebook Place reads:

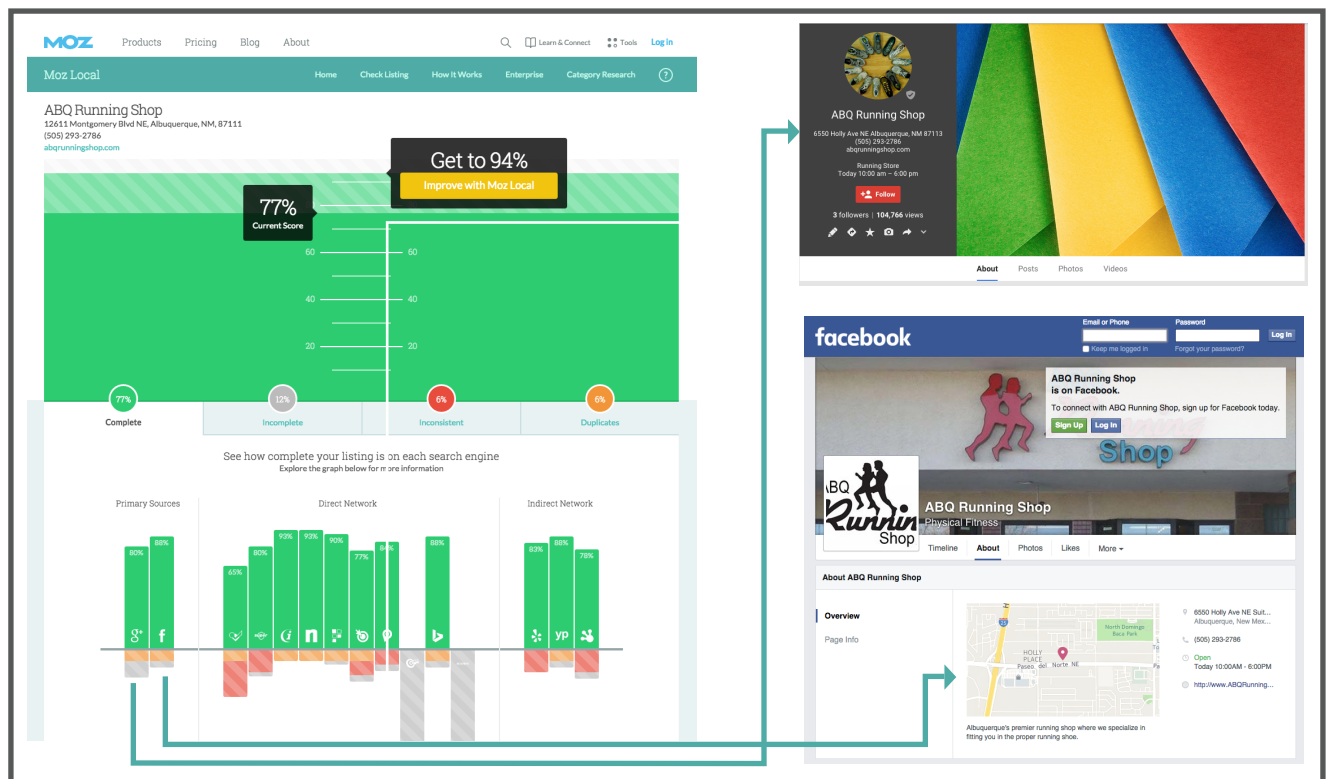
ABQ Running Shop
6550 Holly Ave NE Suite D-2
Albuquerque, NM
(505) 293-2786

In about 15 seconds, you've discovered that an effort has been made to either create or edit these two pages to reflect the new location, but a closer look at the Facebook Place indicates that there is a discrepancy regarding a suite number. You'd make a note to discuss the origin of this suite number with the client at a future date. Don't worry about the lack of zip code on the Facebook Place. This platform typically does not display zip codes.

Performing a citation health quick check (continued)

3) Find out where the data is coming from

At this point, you've identified that both a Facebook and Google My Business listing exist with nearly-correct NAP on each, so the next step is to discover where the old NAP is coming from in the results. Open the results in a second browser window and click on the second result, featuring the old NAP:



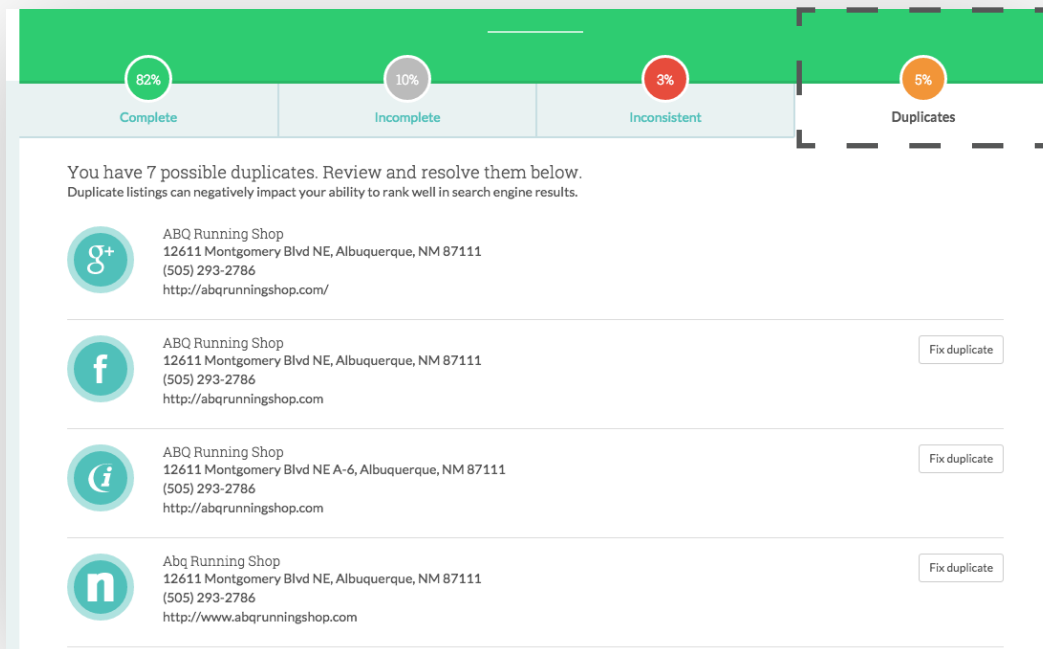
Clicking on the green bars representing Google and Facebook, you realize that this second result is linking to the same Google My Business listing as the first result, with the new NAP on it, but that there is a different Facebook Place being surfaced, with the old location NAP on it.

At this point, while still on the phone with the client, you've spent about 20 seconds and have identified the first major issue: the presence of a duplicate Facebook Place showing bad data to any human or bot encountering it.

Performing a citation health quick check (continued)

4) Understand the extent of the problem

Now you're wondering where else this bad data might exist. Returning to the details page for the correct location, you click on the Duplicates tab and see these results:



Check Listing is telling you that the old Montgomery Blvd. address is still listed on Facebook (which we already knew) and on Infogroup, Neustar Localeze, Bing, and Yahoo!. This client has a problem on about 1/3 of the 15 platforms Check Listing monitors, according to the results. If the client signs up with your agency, you'll want to look beyond these 15 platforms, but even before reaching this stage, you've received a clear indication that NAP inconsistency is likely a widespread issue for the business. Chances are, your citation cleanup service could provide value to this client.

In conclusion

In the early days of Local SEO, all citation-building and cleanup had to be managed manually. With the emergence of tools that can automate some or all of these processes, it's now possible to reduce staff workload and set reasonable client expectations for project completion.

A thorough citation cleanup campaign will move beyond the 15 platforms discussed here to more advanced detection methods, but there is value in having the ability to make a very rapid assessment of citation health on these major sites. Chances are, if an incoming client's citations on these 15 platforms are already in great shape, they are likely to have reasonably consistent NAP elsewhere, signaling that citation cleanup may not be a primary focus in your work with the business. But, if a quick health check identifies a number of inconsistencies, the signal is clear that citation cleanup will be important work for your agency and of real benefit to the client.

As you can see, it takes less than a minute to qualify a typical local client like ABQ Running Shop, but reporting can last for eight or more weeks. Be sure to factor that prolonged reporting period into your contract.
