

The Top 20 Local Search Ranking Factors 2017

An Illustrated Guide

The survey known as Local Search Ranking Factors has been an industry favorite since its inception in 2008. This year, [Whitespark](#) conducted the research and the study, in partnership with [Moz](#), pooling expert opinions of top Local SEOs around the globe to determine which elements are believed to exert the greatest influence on those all-important **Google local pack** rankings.

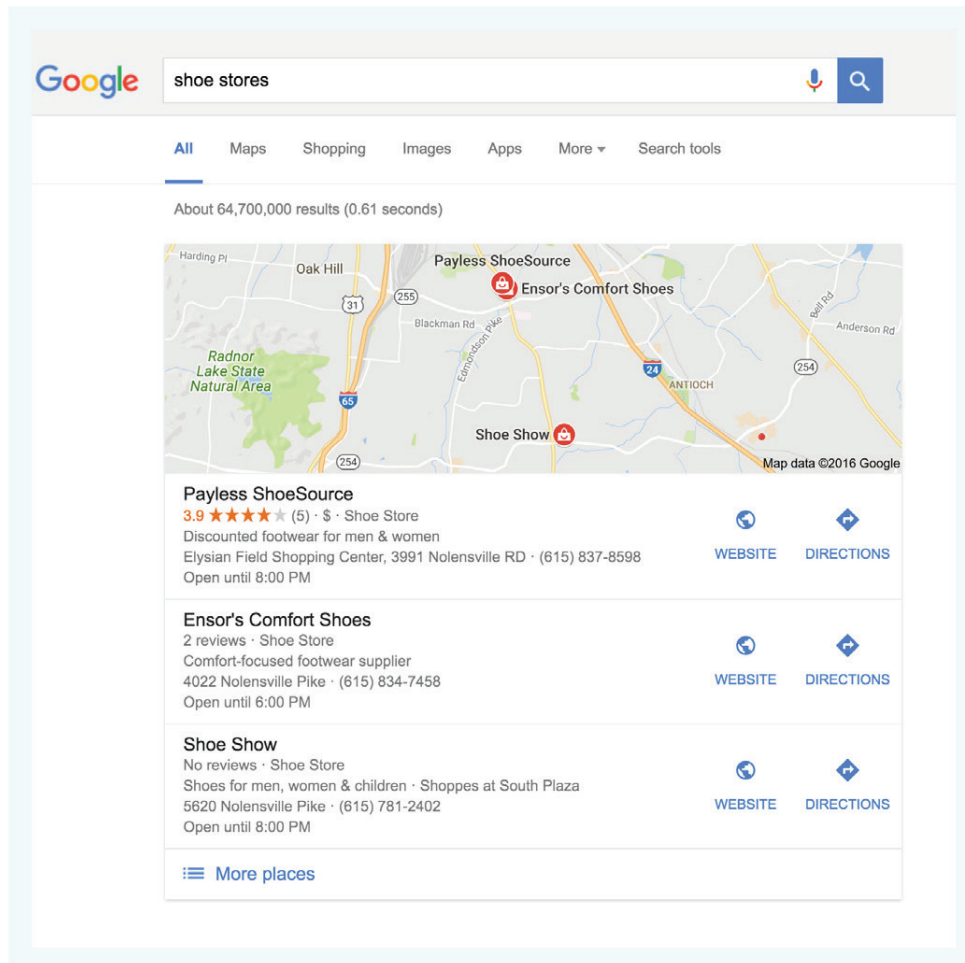
This illustrated guide to the top 20 local search ranking factors will enable you to quickly conceptualize key components that are likely having a direct impact on your enterprise's visibility in Google's local products, and give you practical steps to improve your own rankings.



1. Proximity of Address to the Point of Search

Sometimes referred to as the user-as-centroid phenomenon, this element has hit the #1 spot for the first time ever in the history of this survey. Google has become amazingly sophisticated in detecting the location of a user's desktop or mobile device and then showing him the local businesses nearest him, regardless of whether the searcher includes geographic terms in his search phrase.

This screenshot illustrates how Google has detected that a desktop user is in the Denver/Lakewood area of Colorado, despite the fact that he is only searching for "shoe stores" without specifying his city of location:



This phenomenon becomes particularly obvious as mobile users travel from one end of a city to another, or from city to city, with Google displaying different results for them based upon their shifting location. It's important to understand that a key impact of this reality is that rankings are no longer set in stone for any business or any user. What you see is the local packs may be minimally or significantly different than what each of your customers sees.

It is predicted that user-as-centroid may eventually become so sensitive that Google and other search engines will be showing searchers businesses within a distance of feet from the point of search, rather than blocks or miles.

In the Local SEO industry, there is ongoing discussion as to whether Google's weighting of proximity to the point of search is too great, sometimes delivering results that are simply closest rather than best. It's posited that Google will continue to tweak the dial for this factor.

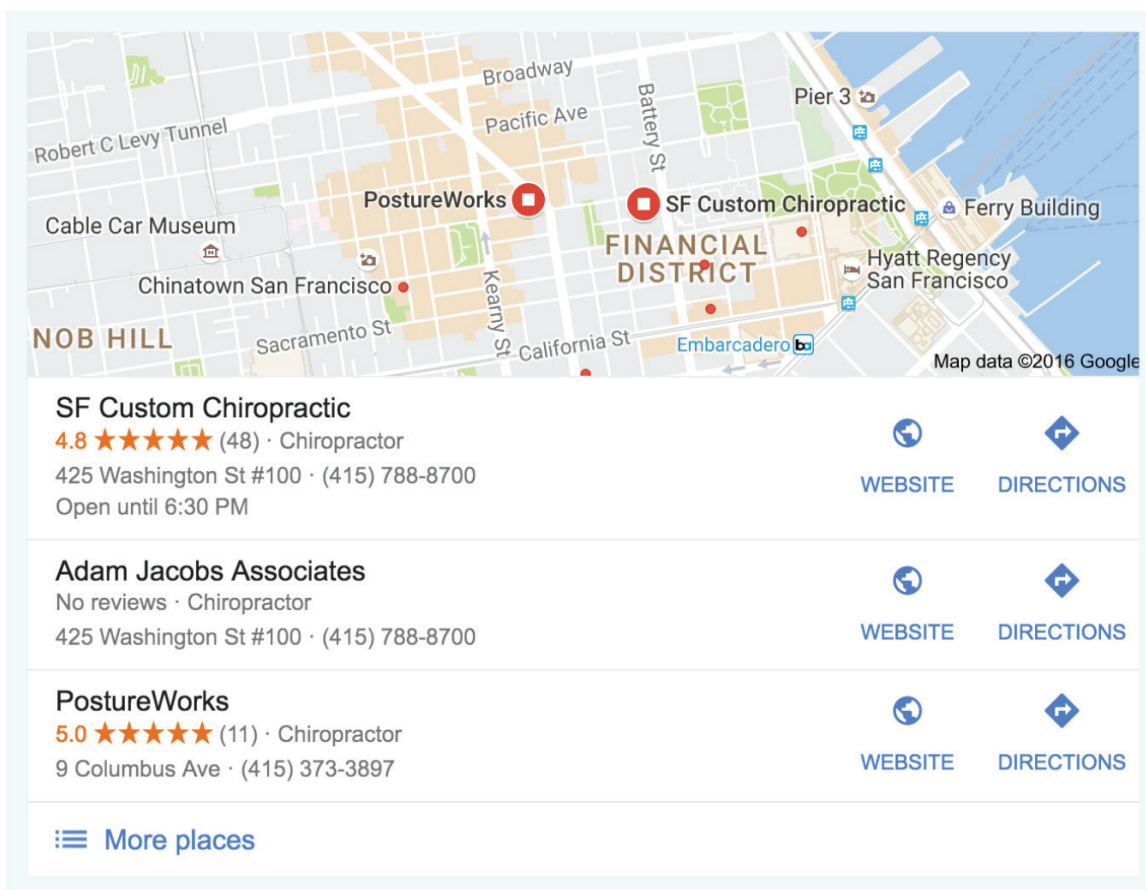
2. Physical Address in City of Search

Your business is most likely to appear in Google's pack of local results for searches that either:

1. Contain the name of the city in which it is physically located, or
2. Stem from devices based in that city

If you are a chiropractor in San Francisco, you are most likely to appear in the local pack of results for a search like "San Francisco chiropractor", or if someone searches for "chiropractor" from a computer or cell phone based in San Francisco.

This search for "chiropractors San Francisco" illustrates this phenomenon, in that all of the results Google is returning in its local pack are for practitioners physically located in that city:



In the above screenshot, you will note that there are no chiropractors in neighboring cities included in these results. It's safe to say that Google has a very definite bias towards physical location in the city of search. This is a simple concept, but it represents a major stumbling block for two distinct business models.

- A) Service area businesses (SABs) with employees who might travel to a city like San Francisco to do plumbing, landscaping, or dog walking, but who are physically based in another city or town. In other words, the SAB does not have a physical address in San Francisco.
- B) Brick-and-mortar businesses located just outside the borders of a major city like San Francisco, Dallas, or Denver. An example of this might be a locally-heralded acupuncturist who is located in Mill Valley, California, but has numerous clients who are happy to travel a few miles outside of San Francisco to visit him.

In both cases, the business owner understandably wants these major city audiences to know his services are available, but because of Google's bias toward physical location, these businesses are unlikely to ever appear in the local pack of results. As things presently stand with Google, the best hope for these types of business owners is to begin developing city landing pages that showcase their work activity in these other cities, whether this involves windows they wash on the skyscrapers of Dallas or lectures they give at a Denver hospital. The goal here is to gain additional visibility in the organic results for these other geographic terms.

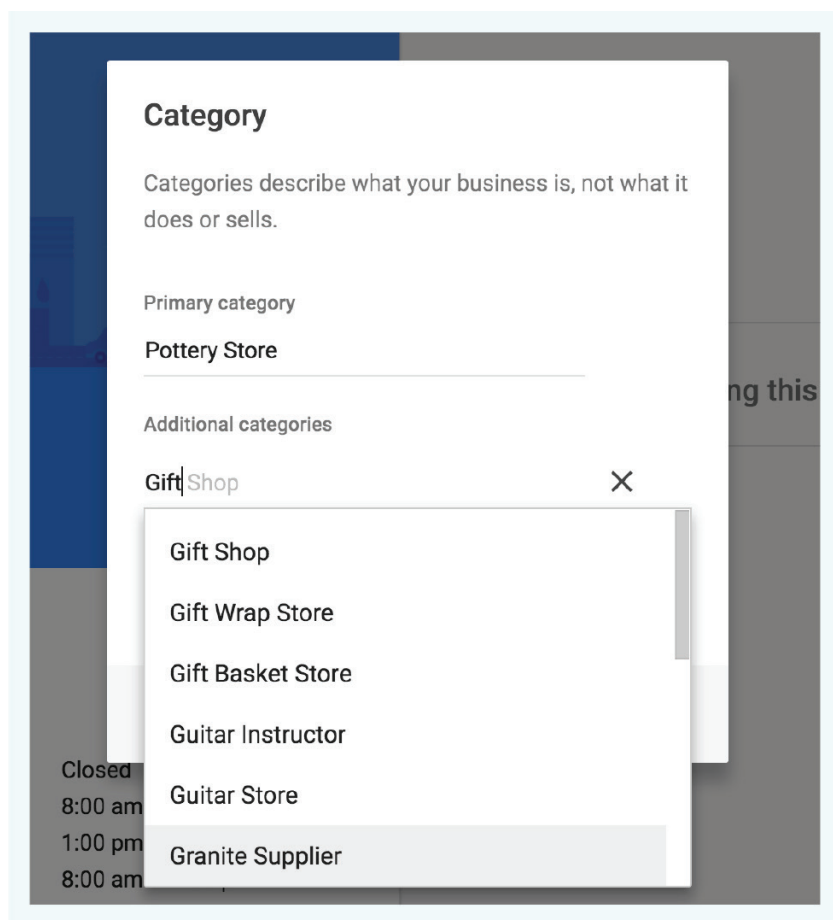
There are some exceptions that may overcome Google's bias. Of note in 2017 is that Google's 2015 Possum update appeared to cause local finder ranking spikes for some businesses just outside of official city borders. Meanwhile, a historical phenomenon is that if you search for a niche business model in or around a major city, or search for any business model in a rural location, you may see listings in the local pack of results that stem from several cities. For example, if there is only one gas station serving a large radius in a rural area, it may pop up as a local result for any of the towns in that region. This scenario, however, tends to be the exception rather than the rule.

In sum, it is generally wise for local business owners to set the goal of earning **local pack rankings** for searches related to their city of location, and **organic rankings** for any other geographic terms they feel are important.

3. Proper GMB Category Associations

Google maintains a base of categories by which it identifies types of businesses. While creating your Google My Business listing in the Google My Business dashboard, you'll be asked to select up to 10 categories that describe what the business is. You do not need to select all 10. Sometimes, only 1 or 2 categories will be appropriate matches for your business.

Without proper categorization, your business has little chance of ranking well in the local pack results for its important terms. This illustration depicts editing the categories in the Google My Business dashboard:










You'll be asked to select up to 10 categories that describe your business.

On the public-facing Google My Business listing, Google typically only displays a single category, but within the dashboard, be sure you've added as many as are appropriate to fully inform Google about your type of business.

[Google offers very specific guidelines for choosing categories](#) that you should read in full before creating your Google My Business listing. In general, Google wants you to select the fewest and most specific categories that describe your business while avoiding redundancy. See examples of that in the guidelines, and, as you're planning out your best categories, a free tool like [Mike Blumenthal's Google Category Search](#) can help you see what's available for your industry.

4. Quality/Authority of Inbound Links to Domain

You might well wonder how links pointing to your website domain could impact your placement in Google's local pack, but it's very important to know that **organic factors demonstrably influence local rank**. For as long as you are in business, you will be hoping to both build and earn links to your website from high quality sources. Paid software like [Moz Pro](#) can help you dive deep into a variety of link metrics and show you how you stack up to your competitors:

Metric	barefootcontessa.com	mycarolinakitchen.blogspot.com	ourblissfullydeliciouslife.
 External Followed Links	16k	719m ✓	719m ✓
 Followed Linking Root Domains	1.4k	1.4m ✓	1.4m ✓
 Domain MozRank	5.58	8.62 ✓	8.62 ✓
 Domain MozTrust	5.71	8.55 ✓	8.55 ✓
 Total External Links	17k	786m ✓	786m ✓
 Total Linking Root Domains	1.5k	1.6m ✓	1.6m ✓
 Total Links	50k	1.3b ✓	1.3b ✓

High quality, authoritative links for local businesses might include online newspaper mentions, Chamber of Commerce listings, features on high profile local blogs and sites, or inclusion in major industry or local directories. Read the [Beginners Guide to Linkbuilding](#) for a crash course in this form of marketing, bearing in mind that links are consistently cited as having a significant impact on both organic and local rankings.

Most local businesses in competitive markets will need to actively build at least some links beyond creating local business listings (which do, of course, feature links to websites). Don't overlook the exciting opportunities offered by [link earning](#), the artform of creating different forms of content that naturally merit links from an engaged public.

Of interest, this factor has jumped up from #12 in the 2015 Local Search Ranking Factors survey to occupy spot #4 in 2017 — an extremely strong signal that every competitive local business must have a strategy for acquiring links.

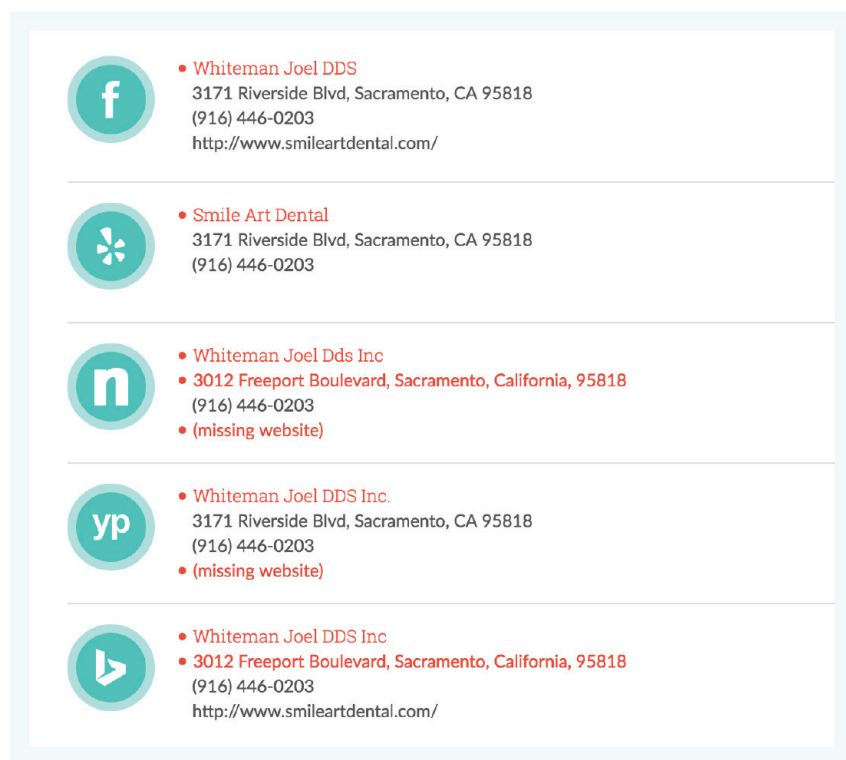
5. Consistency of Citations on the Primary Data Sources

A citation is any web-based mention of your company's partial or complete name, address, and phone number (NAP). A "structured citation" refers to a listing of your business on any online directory that exists to provide this type of information. Acxiom, Neustar Localeze, Factual and Infogroup are generally identified as the 'primary data sources'.

Inconsistent citations might involve:

- A difference in the business name (i.e. Smile Dentistry vs. Smile Dental Clinic)
- A wrong street address, a typo in street address numbers, or a missing suite number
- A wrong or different phone number, or an improperly implemented call tracking number
- A different or wrong website URL

Citation inconsistencies may arise from errors made during the citation-building process and these mistakes may then be duplicated across the [local search ecosystem](#). Inconsistencies also commonly arise if a business has moved or changed phone numbers any time in the past decade or so. Apart from causing confusion for humans, these discrepancies hinder Google's ability to trust the data they have gathered from around the web about a given business. A lack of trust on Google's part can spell ranking difficulties for the business.



This illustration depicts a result from the free Moz Check Listing tool for a randomly chosen dentist in Sacramento, CA. Highlighted in red are instances the tool is finding of variants of the business name, address and website:

These inconsistencies not only reduce the trust search engines feel in the data they are finding about this business, but they may also be misdirecting current and potential customers.

Every local business should conduct a citation audit, turning up as many instances as possible of any variations from the authoritative business NAP. Free tools like [Moz Check Listing](#) save time, but the business may also need to back this up by manually searching Google's results to surface additional inconsistencies on additional platforms not tracked by tools.

All of this discovery work leads to what is known as "citation cleanup": a campaign in which the business corrects as many inconsistencies as it can find. This entire process can be done manually, but it can be incredibly time-consuming, especially if the business has hundreds or thousands of locations. Businesses that discover they have a significant amount of citation inconsistency may want to consider using a paid citation cleanup service such as [Moz Local](#) or others.

6. Domain Authority of Website

At present, the overall strength of a local business' website plays a major role in how it ranks both locally and organically. Simply stated, [Domain Authority](#) is a metric used to predict how well a website may perform in search results compared to other websites. Moz offers a Domain Authority toolbar called the [MozBar](#) that makes it easy to see the DA of any website in the search engine results. In the following screenshot, this restaurant has earned a Domain Authority of 39:

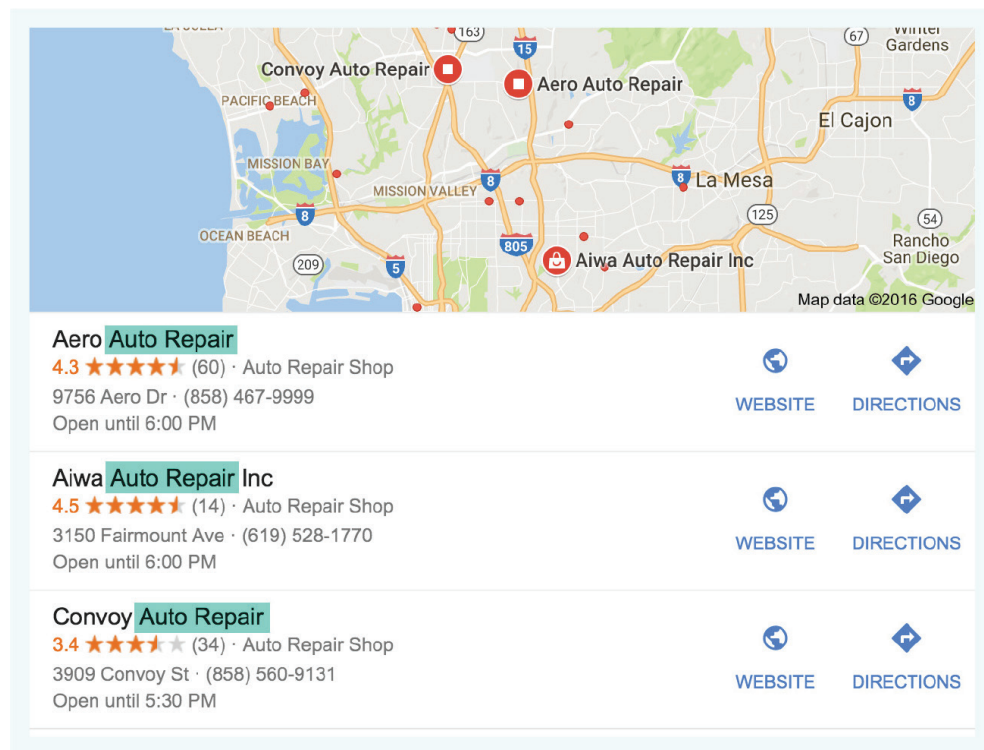


There are many factors that make up the domain authority of a website. Some of these include the age of a website and the number and quality of links pointing to it.

In general, every local business will want to publish the strongest possible website. This means having a user-friendly, optimized site with excellent content that earns links and social mentions over time. Many businesses will also need to intentionally build links on sites that are relevant to their industry, geography, or topic. You will always be working to build your domain authority, and the higher it is, the better your chances of ranking well for your most important terms.

7. Product/Service Keyword in GMB Business Title

Your business title is the legal name or DBA of your business. It's believed that, if your company name includes one of your product or service terms, it makes it a little easier to rank locally for those terms. Here's an illustration of the local pack results for the search "auto repair shop san diego":



Keywords in your official business name rank higher

As shown above, all three of the top results include "auto repair" in the business title. Because of their company names, these enterprises may have a bit of a ranking advantage over a competitor simply called "The Pit Stop," or "Ride Fixers."

Because Google appears to weight keyword-oriented business titles, it can be tempting to add additional keywords to a business name, but this is against [Google's guidelines](#). Any violation of the guidelines can lead to competitors and SEOs reporting the issue to Google, or to Google's own detection of spam, which can result in them taking manual action against the listing. It is seldom worth it to risk this.

If the business decides to legally rebrand itself to include product/service keywords, then that's totally above board, but must be followed up by a complete citation audit and cleanup campaign so that all web-based references to the company are made consistent. And, if a business is just starting out, it makes sense to carefully consider how to name it, bearing in mind that having a product or service term in the company name may be an advantage.

8. Quality/Authority of Structured Citations

Structured citations are listings of your business on traditional local business directories. It makes sense that there is more value in getting listed on authoritative platforms than on little-known or spammy ones. One smart way to determine which directories are authoritative for your business is to look up your industry or categories in Google to see what ranks highest for those searches, like this:

In this simple search for “doctors Albuquerque,” it becomes quickly apparent that sites like HealthGrades, WebMD, Docspot, Zocdoc, and RateMeds would all be authoritative citations for a medical professional in that city.

Family Doctors near Albuquerque, NM - Family Practitioners - Family ...
<https://www.healthgrades.com/family-practice-directory/nm-new-mexico/albuquerque>
Find and research local Family Practitioners in Albuquerque, NM including ratings, contact information, and more.

Internal Medicine Doctors near Albuquerque, NM - Internists
<https://www.healthgrades.com/internal-medicine-directory/nm-new-mexico/albuquerque>
Find and research local Internists in Albuquerque, NM including ratings, contact information, and more.

Primary Care Doctors - Albuquerque, NM | DocSpot
www.docspot.com/d/NM/albuquerque/primary-care.html ▼
500 primary care doctors near Albuquerque, NM – 154 have patient ratings. Find the one that's right for you.

General Practitioners in Albuquerque, NM - WebMD Physician Directory
doctor.webmd.com/find-a-doctor/specialty/general.../new-mexico/albuquerque ▼ WebMD ▼
Find General Practitioners in Albuquerque, NM. ... General Practitioners Near Albuquerque, NM. Your Search Criteria > Rate This Doctor. 2211 Lomas Blvd ...

All Specialties near Albuquerque | US News Doctors - US News Health
health.usnews.com/doctors/specialists.../albuquerque-nm ▼ U.S. News & World Report ▼
Choose a specialist type you want to see near Albuquerque.

Top Doctors in Albuquerque, NM - RateMeds
<https://www.ratemds.com/best-doctors/nm/albuquerque/> ▼
His practice has a laser that shows if you have a cavity or not. I was told I have three cavities by my previous dentist. The laser showed the teeth to just have "st.

Find A Doctor - ABQ Health Partners
<https://www.abqhph.com/FindADoctor> ▼

Doctor Finder | Lovelace Health System in New Mexico
www.lovelace.com/doctor-finder ▼ Lovelace Health Insurance Group ▼
... Russian, Spanish. Doctor Finder - Locations ... About - Privacy Notice - Verify Affiliation. Hospitals in Albuquerque, New Mexico | ©2014 Lovelace Health System.

Medicaid Doctors in Albuquerque, NM: Book Appointments Online ...
www.zocdoc.com > Find a Doctor > New Mexico > Albuquerque Doctors > Zocdoc ▼
Doctors in Albuquerque, NM that take Medicaid. See Reviews and Book Online Instantly. It's free! All appointment times are guaranteed by our dentists and ...

To get a sense of whether you have accurate listings on 15 of the most important, general citation platforms, look up your business name and zip code using the free [Moz Check Listing tool](#). This will show you where you're already established, and where you may need to create new citations.

Follow this up with a branded search: searching for your own company to see which platforms are ranking well for your business name. For example, a restaurant in Albuquerque might see results like this for its branded search:

Here, we can see that sites like Yelp, Facebook, TripAdvisor, Zomato and Allmenus rank highly, meaning that the business should be sure its listings are claimed there and feature accurate information.

El Patio de Albuquerque | Home Cooking New Mexico Style
elpatioabq.com/ ▼
El Patio de Albuquerque Restaurant serves traditional northern New Mexican cooking. Come enjoy cocktails on our lovely patio at 142 Harvard SE in the UNM ...

El Patio De Albuquerque - 162 Photos & 301 Reviews - New Mexican ...
www.yelp.com > Restaurants > New Mexican Cuisine ▼ Yelp ▼
★★★★☆ Rating: 4 - 301 reviews - Price range: \$11-30
(505) 268-4245 · 142 Harvard Dr SE Albuquerque, NM 87106 ... 301 reviews of El Patio De Albuquerque "Two words: Stuffed Sopapilla. Three more words: ...

El Patio De Albuquerque - Menu, Prices & Restaurant Reviews ...
www.tripadvisor.com > ... > Albuquerque > Albuquerque Restaurants ▼ TripAdvisor ▼
★★★★☆ Rating: 4 - 213 reviews
El Patio De Albuquerque, Albuquerque: See 213 unbiased reviews of El Patio De Albuquerque, rated 4 of 5 on TripAdvisor and ranked #41 of 1724 restaurants ...

El Patio De Albuquerque | Facebook
www.facebook.com > Places > Albuquerque, New Mexico > Mexican Restaurant ▼
★★★★☆ Rating: 4.4 - 163 votes
142 Harvard Dr SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106-3521 ... El Patio De Albuquerque, Albuquerque, New Mexico. 836 likes · 53 talking about this · 6042 were here.

El Patio de Albuquerque | Larry's Albuquerque Food Musings
www.abqtoplen.com/blog/el-patio-de-albuquerque/ ▼
Oct 2, 2015 - I first came across El Patio when I arrived in town from the East Coast and was staying temporarily in a villa on Sigma Chi bordering the north ...

El Patio de Albuquerque, University Heights, Albuquerque ... - Zomato
www.zomato.com > ... > Albuquerque > Rest of Albuquerque > University Heights ▼
★★★★☆ Rating: 3.8 - 563 votes - Price range: \$\$
Oct 3, 2015 - El Patio de Albuquerque Albuquerque; El Patio de Albuquerque, University Heights; Get Menu, Reviews, Contact, Location, Phone Number, ...

9. Consistency of Citations on Tier 1 Citations Source

The local search ranking factors survey defines tier 1 citation sources as the 5-10 most prominent local business data platforms on the web; entities like Citygrid, Facebook or YP. Consistency refers to the accuracy with which your core business data is published across the web. If your name, address, phone number, website address or categories vary from one platform to another, this can lessen the trust Google feels in the validity of your data, which can, in turn, lead to lower local pack rankings.

Choosing a business at random and entering its name and zip code into the free Moz Check Listing tool, we can quickly identify inconsistencies on prominent citation sources, represented by the red bars in the graph:

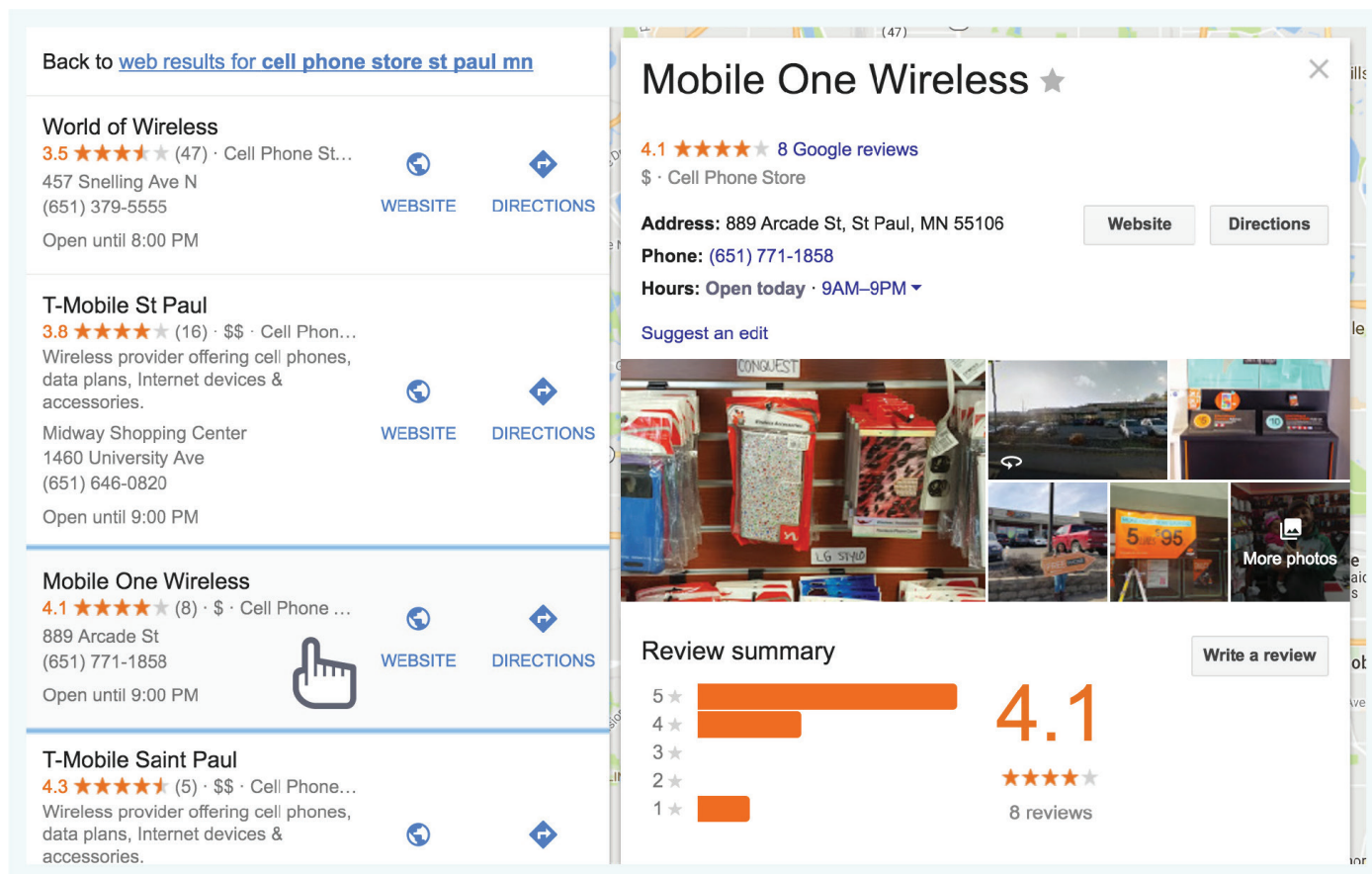


Citation inconsistencies can arise from a wide variety of events including rebranding, mergers/acquisitions, business moves, change of phone numbers, third party edits, accidental development of duplicate listings and simple data management neglect. In order to prevent misdirection and loss of customers, as well as negative impacts on rankings, these data variants must be corrected, either manually or via tools.

Citation consistency has been a top local search ranking factor since the inception of this survey, meaning that active location data management remains a vital component of local search marketing for every local business.

10. Click-through Rate from Search Results

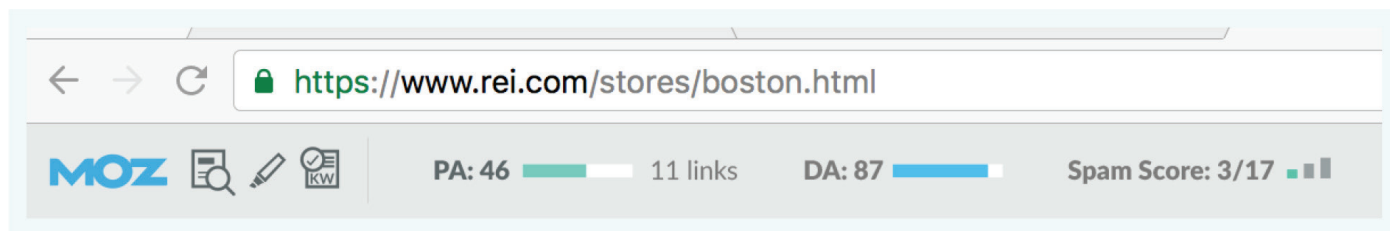
Google monitors user behavior, and it's believed they can use the data they gather to gauge the relevance/popularity of one result over another. If Google tracks that more users are clicking on your listings in their results, this could lead to a rise in your rankings. Each user makes his own choice about what he clicks on in the various types of search engine results, as shown here:



A variety of elements are believed to influence local clickthrough rates, including review stars, number of reviews, images, and placement within the set of results. For more on this topic, please see this excellent [Click Test Study](#) which details where users click most in Google's Local Finder view. In your Google My Business dashboard, Google provides a service called "[Insights](#)" which gives you some click data, but it's important to know that there has always been industry speculation regarding the completeness and accuracy of the data Google shares.

11. Quality/Authority of Inbound Links to GMB Landing Page URL

Similar to factor #4, this one speaks to the links you have earned to the specific page on your website your Google My Business listing points to. This could be your home page, or, if yours is a multi-location enterprise, it could be a landing page like this one representing the Boston location of outdoors outfitter REI:

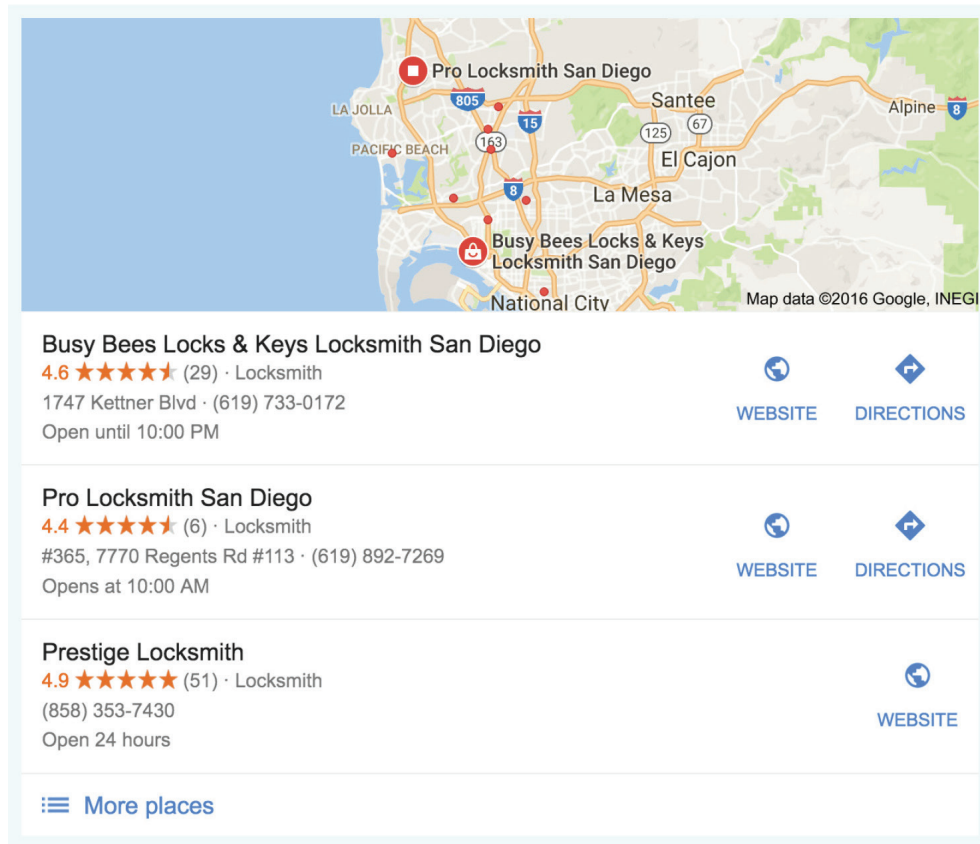


As you can see from the above [MozBar](#) reading, this landing page has earned a total of 11 links, and each of those can then be evaluated for its quality/authority.

Local businesses can earn some links to their local landing pages via citation development, provided that they are being careful to list the correct landing page URL when creating their local business listings for each location. In a competitive market, it will likely be necessary to go beyond citation building, making their store landing pages link-worthy enough to earn additional authoritative links.

12. Location Keywords in GMB Business Title

If your business name happens to contain the name of the city in which it's physically located, you can see a ranking boost from this fortunate circumstance. However, adding geographic modifiers to a business name that doesn't legally contain those terms is expressly forbidden by [Google's guidelines](#). Here's a local pack that appears to illustrate this concept well:



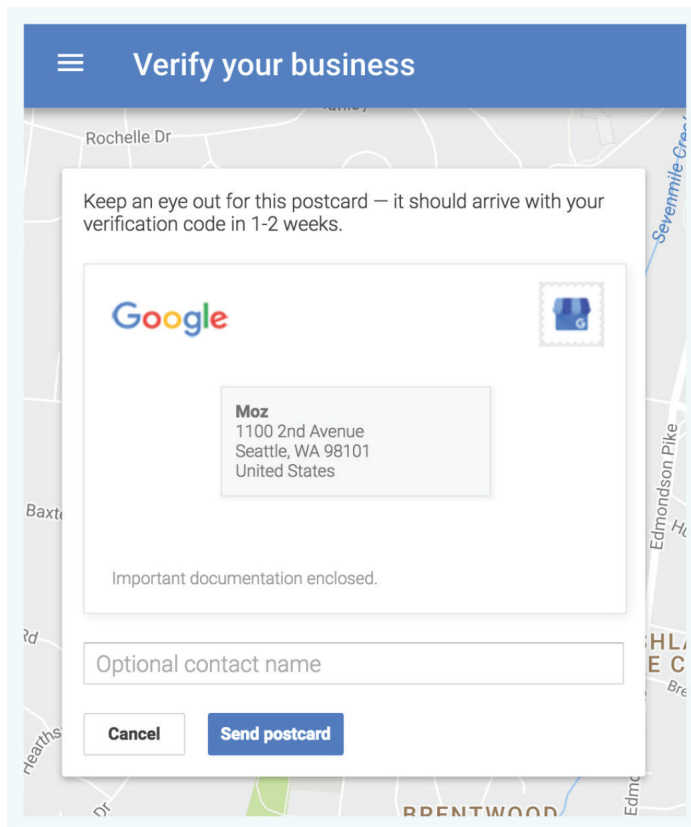
When naming a brand new business, the owner may like to take into consideration Google's continued bias in favor of keyword-oriented business titles. However, if the business plans to grow from a single location to a multi-location enterprise in the future, a geographic term in the business name can actually be more of a hindrance than a help.

The business ranking #1 is including the term 'san diego' in their Google My Business listing title, but if you visit the associated website, that term is absent from their logo. The business ranking #2 also contains the city name in their business title, but this matches the wording of their website logo. The business ranking #3 does not have any geographic terms in its name.

The concern here for the top ranking business is that any company ranking beneath it, any member of the public or any SEO can do their own research. If, after a thorough investigation, they determine that business #1 is violating Google's guidelines, [they can report this](#). Penalties for keyword-stuffing can then result from which it can be very difficult to recover.

13. Verified GMB Listing

Creating your Google My Business listing for your local business is your first step to being included in Google's index. Your second step is to verify your ownership of the listing. These days, this typically involves receiving a postcard/letter from Google containing a pin number which you must enter in order to complete verification.



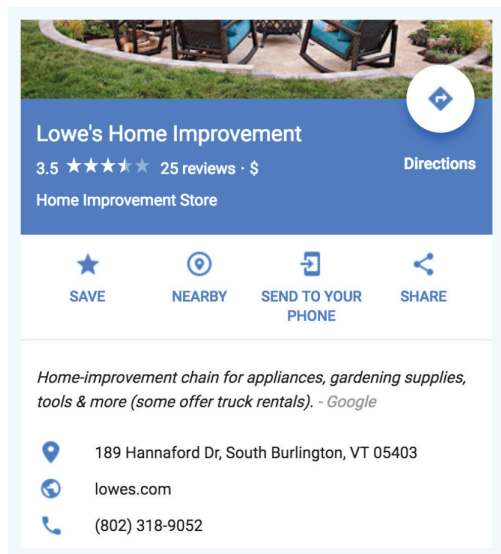
Google has experimented with different verification options over the years, including phone verification, and more recently, one-click website verification and even video verification.

It's a best practice to be sure that your local business listings are claimed under your own Google account, rather than under a third party account like that of a marketing company you might contract with. You always want to have maximum, direct control of your Google My Business listings. That being said, it's important to know that verification of your listing does not render it immune to public editing. It is Google's practice to enable Google users to suggest edits to your listing data, including core NAP edits and photo uploads.

Because of this circumstance, you should either manually monitor your Google My Business listings on a regular basis so that you can catch any changes, or use a service like [Moz Local](https://moz.com/local) which will quickly alert you to any edits that are made to the core NAP your listings.

14. HTML NAP Matching GMB Listing NAP

Google will be looking at the website page you've linked to from your Google My Business listing to cross reference the name, address and phone number (NAP) of your business. See if you can spot the NAP mismatch between the Google My Business listing on the left and the website landing page on the right:



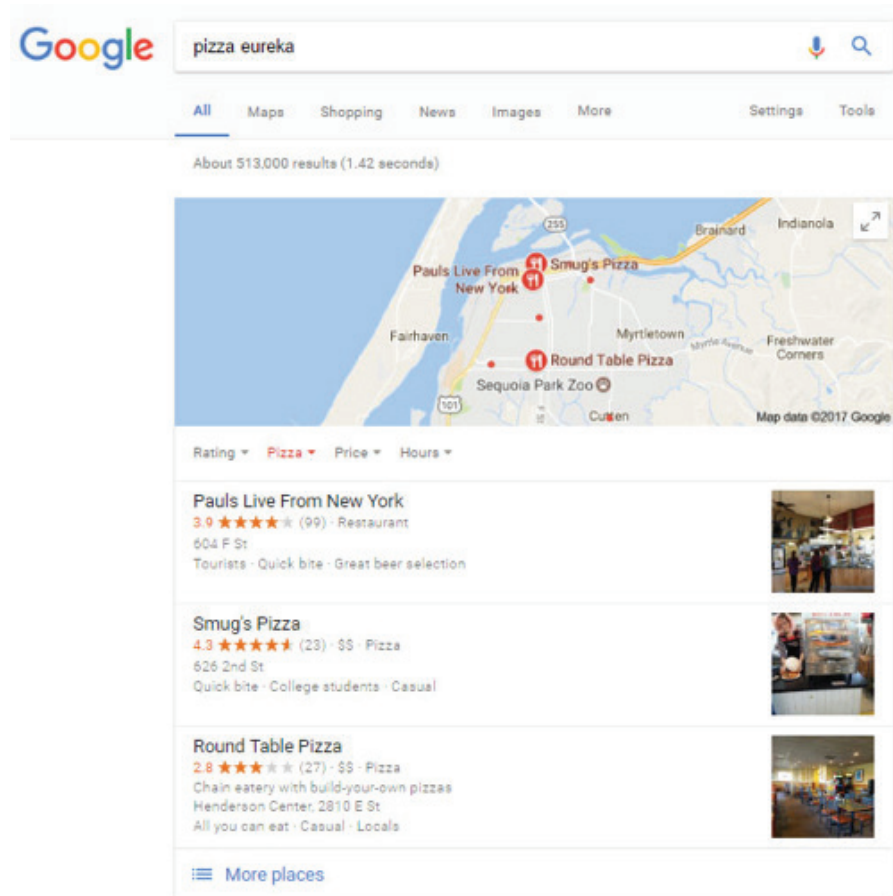
Check for inconsistencies in name, address, and phone number

That's right — the names don't match. So, basically, this entity is failing to make Google feel confident about the correct name of the company. To correct this discrepancy, either the Google My Business listing or the web page it points to should be edited. This business should also consider removing that store number from the section of the landing page where it's listing its core NAP. It's fine to post a store number somewhere on the page, but including it as part of the street address could potentially confuse Google.

Minor variants like St. vs. Street or Ste. vs. Suite do not count as discrepancies, but spelling mistakes, missing elements like suite numbers, different branding, and wrong addresses or phone numbers are mismatches that can lead to ranking problems as Google loses trust in the validity of the data they have about your company.

15. GMB Primary Category Matches a Broader Category of the Search Category

This factor is one of the more challenging to understand. The concept is that a business which has chosen a broad primary category, like restaurant, may have a ranking advantage over one that has chosen a narrowed primary category, like pizza, when a user searches for something like “pizza Eureka.” In the following screenshot, you can see that the top-ranking business has the broader category showing as primary:



This factor didn't make it into the 2015 Local Search Ranking Factors top 20, but its presence this year should encourage local business owners and their marketers to dive deeper into testing the impacts of category choice. Given that proper GMB categorization has been a top 5 local search ranking factor for many years running, this related factor is deserving of continuing research.

Google's guidelines emphasize that they want businesses to choose the fewest and most specific categories, avoiding repetitions like primary category: restaurant, secondary category: Thai restaurant. Bearing these guidelines in mind, the idea that opting for the broader category as primary could influence rank is quite interesting ... and somewhat controversial.

In 2016, Dan Leibson of Local SEO Guide conducted a [small but worthwhile experiment](#) surrounding category modification and subsequent loss of local pack visibility which led to an important discussion in the article's comments. Indeed, Google's category guidelines [continue to spark industry discussion in 2017](#), highlighting the need for further exploration of how broad vs. narrow categories may influence Google's interpretation of relevance and the rankings that stem from it.

16. Diversity of Inbound Links to Domain

Diversity in links can be defined as the variety of different sources that link to a given website. Has a business received 100 total links from just 5 different websites, or has it received 100 total links from 80 different websites, presenting a picture to Google of genuine diversity?

Linking Domains

Gauge your site's influence by analyzing the root domains that link to the URL or domain you've entered.

Target

1 - 50 Linking Domains [Request CSV](#) [Prev](#) [Next](#)

Linking Root Domain	DA	Linking Root Domains
latimes.com/	96	66,978
nps.gov/	95	52,180
today.com/	92	26,062
dmoz.org/	91	19,436
bostonglobe.com/	89	29,478
event.com/	88	21,762
cntraveler.com/	88	9,774
travelandleisure.com/	85	9,814
outsideonline.com/	81	7,371
wikitravel.org/	76	9,013
sunset.com/	74	4,302

Analysis by software like [Moz Pro](#) quickly paints a picture of the variety of sources linking to a particular local business:

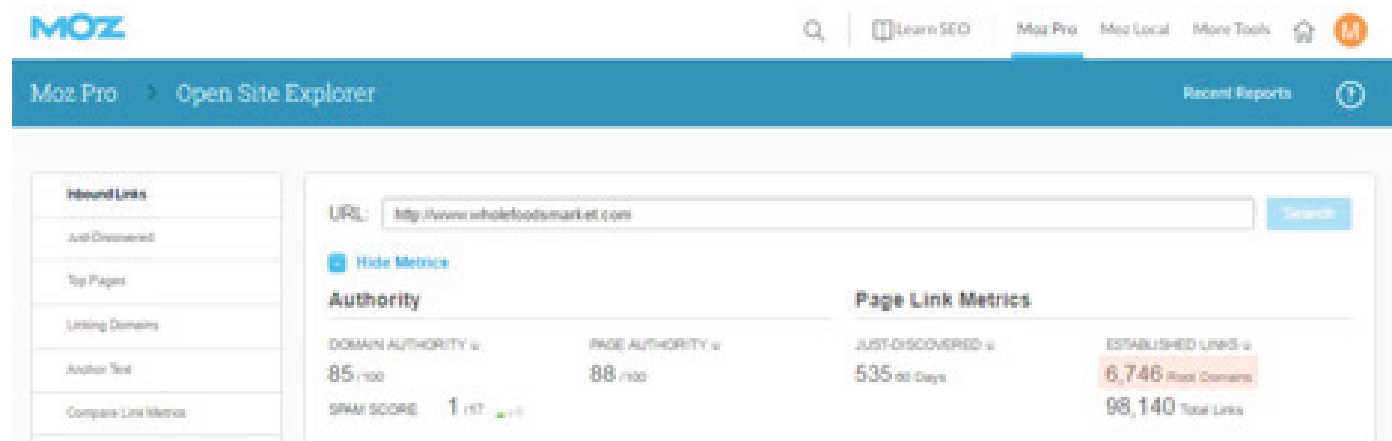
In practical terms, diversity is a gauge of the influence your business is having across the web. If you are earning links from a diversified set of platforms, it's a signal to Google that your own website is relevant to a wide variety of interests, needs and searches.

Of note, this factor was absent from the 2015 Local Search Ranking factors top 20. Its inclusion in 2017 forms part of an overall pattern of increased emphasis on the importance of links.

17. Quantity of Inbound Links to Domain

The sheer number of third party websites that link to yours is believed to influence local pack rankings, though quantity is not as important as the authority highlighted in factor #4.

Here, we can see in [Moz Pro's](#) Open Site Explorer feature a major brand which has earned a significant total volume of links:

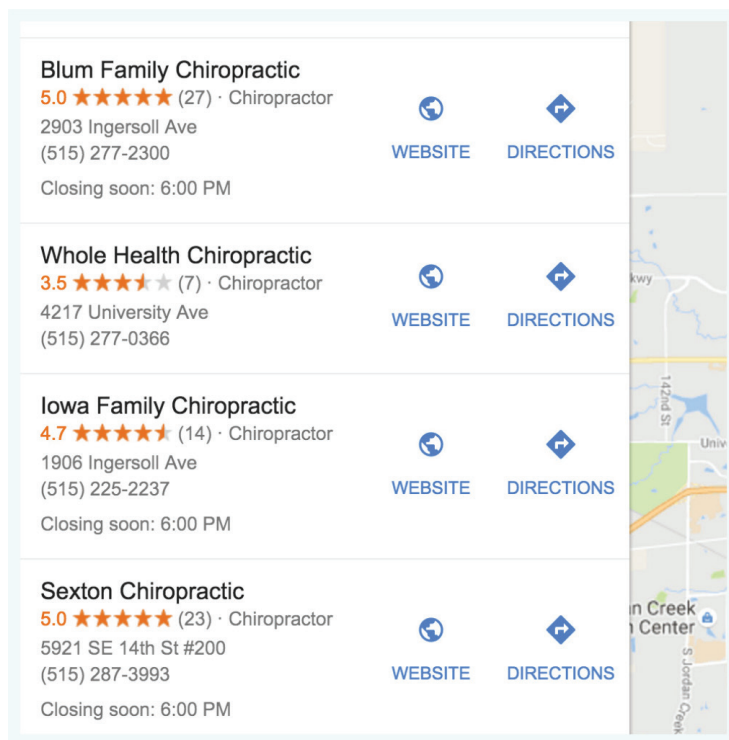


While the most valuable links pointing to this brand's website may stem from major news sources or highly popular blogs, Google's continued weighting of link quantity means that even a link from a low quality website could be contributing to the high rankings of this business.

It's important to note this factor didn't make it into the 2015 Local Search Ranking Factors top 20, but its presence in 2017 is part and parcel of the industry's increasing awareness of the role links are playing in local pack rankings.

18. Quantity of Native Google Reviews w/Text

“Native” Google reviews are those left by users in Google’s local product, and the concept behind this local search ranking factor is a basic one: the more reviews you have in comparison to competitors, the better your chances of outranking them. However, it’s very important not to oversimplify this. As the following screenshot of local results for chiropractors in Des Moines, IA demonstrates, having a larger quantity of reviews than competitors **does not automatically trigger superior rankings**:

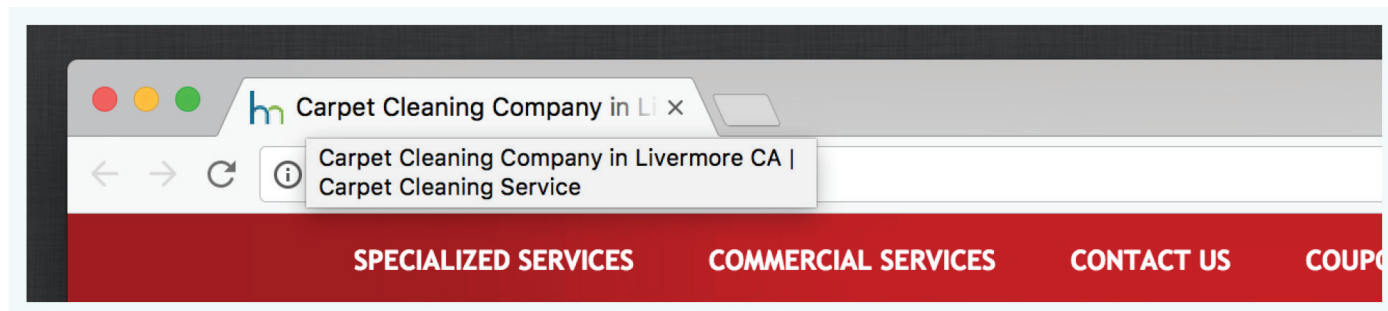


A business owner looking at the above results might wonder how a business with only 7 reviews is outranking others with 14 or 23 reviews. Always remember that several hundred signals are believed to be used by Google to determine rank. The third and fourth businesses in our example might have weaker websites, be farther away from the searcher, or be newer companies, among dozens of other possible influences.

Your local business will always be seeking to earn a steady, on-going stream of Google reviews. It’s always advisable to adhere to [Google’s review policy](#) to avoid review takedowns. These guidelines prohibit offering money, products or services in exchange for reviews, reviewing your own company, or writing negative reviews of your competitors. Reviews should always be left directly by consumers using their own devices (not an in-store review kiosk or device). Never post reviews on behalf of real or fake customers or purchase any marketing service that offers to do so.

19. City/State in GMB Landing Page Title

Your Google My Business listing links to a page on your website (a landing page). This page on your site will have an element in its code called a “[Title Tag](#).” This is typically located in the <head> section of the code and the words contained in it send a very important signal to both search engine bots and human users regarding the topic of the page in question. The title tag of a page typically displays in the upper left hand corner of your browser window:



In this example, a carpet cleaning company has included the city of **Livermore** and the state of **California** in the title tag, making it absolutely clear to both Google and customers where the business is located.

Careful planning of all title tags on your website is a foundational task of search engine optimization, and it's believed that a geographically optimized title tag on the page your Google My Business listing points to can give you a little ranking boost.

20. Quantity of Inbound Links to Domain from Locally-Relevant Domains

A locally-relevant domain may be defined as a website that is established as a resource for a given geographic area. Earning links from these types of sites can establish your own site in relationship to its city or region in the eyes of Google.

The following illustration shows the some of the links a restaurant in Marin County in the San Francisco Bay Area of California has accrued. Of the 10 links shown, 6 stem from locally-relevant websites:

Linking Root Domain	DA	Linking Root Domains
+ constantcontact.com/	95	104,891
+ sfgate.com/	91	54,480
+ sffs.org/	89	117,568
+ marinij.com/	88	9,774
+ ticketfly.com/	83	9,985
+ seriouseats.com/	80	12,510
+ ptreyes.org/	80	31,647
+ marinmagazine.com/	79	12,757
+ sunset.com/	74	4,302
+ marinij.com/	67	3,381

These valuable types of links can be acquired from a variety of sources including local news sites, local online magazines, local blogs, sponsorships of local events or organizations, membership in local business organizations and the building of relationships with other local businesses.

As with several other factors in the 2017 Local Search Ranking Factors survey results, locally-relevant links has made it into the top 20 though it was absent in previous years. This category of links can be one even very small local businesses can pursue with the right combination of excellence, newsworthiness, and a creative outreach campaign.

Summing Up

The top 20 components of the 2017 Local Search Ranking Factors survey have highlighted two important trends:

- ✓ **The continued, fundamental importance of active citation management.** 6 of the top 20 factors relate to local business listing elements that can be directly controlled by the business and another 8 of them relate to factors over which the business has some influence (like reviews) or none (like searcher proximity).
- ✓ **The recognition of the critical role links play in local pack rankings.** 6 of this year's factor relate directly or indirectly to links, emphasizing the need for competitive local businesses to earmark creative and financial resources for link building and earning.

Your study of this document has acquainted you with key factors that are almost certainly impacting your local pack rankings, but don't stop there. Continued study, experimentation, and documentation of your unique findings for your particular company and industry will take you from local novice to adept, enabling your enterprise to effectively pursue excellent local visibility in the months and years ahead.

Want to learn more?

Please contact enterpriselocal@moz.com for more information.



1100 2nd Avenue, Suite 500 | Seattle, WA 98101 | enterpriselocal@moz.com | moz.com/local

© Copyright 2017 Moz, Inc. All rights reserved.