Local Citation Building Best-Practices

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Building citations is the hardest part of getting your business visible in the local search results.

Doing it right will take you a few hours. Doing it wrong will take many hours (and possibly a lot of money).

Worst of all, ineffective citation-building or ignoring citations altogether can mean fewer customers for you. You're unlikely to be visible in the Google+ Local results or elsewhere in local search as long as your citations are a mess. That's wasted time, and a wasted opportunity.

I've written this post to help you keep it at just a few hours of work, to help you build citations the right way the first time (and not have to redo them), and to help you get the most local-rankings oomph out of your citations.

Pull up a chair, grab your energizing libation of choice, and read through these best-practices. Then you can apply them and enjoy greater local visibility to customers.

1) Don't be shortsighted and dig up some poor soul on Fiverr or ODesk or ELance to work on your citations. Any mistakes they make will cost you in the long run - and it's easy to make mistakes if you don't have lots of experience with citation-building. This is one of those cases where cheap is expensive.

2) Google may be king, but make sure you also have correct and complete listings on Bing Places, Yahoo Local, and Apple Maps.

3) Know that there are 5 basic types of sites you'll want to get listed on:

1. Data-aggregators (e.g. LocalEze).
2. Horizontal directories (e.g. Yelp).
3. Industry-specific directories (e.g. Avvo).
4. Region-specific sites (e.g. Denver.com/places).
5. Sites where you can get an "unstructured" citation, like a mention in a newspaper or by a "local" blogger.

By the way, some sites can fall into more than one category (e.g. a site like ghds.org).

4) Don't confuse citations with links. Remember: citations are just mentions of your name, address, and phone number. To Google, they increase your business's relevance to and "prominence" in a specific city or region. It's true that most of your business listings include a link to your website, but few of these links pass any PageRank (AKA "link juice"). The real value is in the citation itself. The value of links in your listings is simply to strengthen the association of your website with your NAP information.

yelp Find tacos, cheap dinner, Max's
Home   About Me   Write a Review   Find F
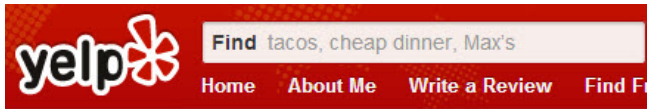
Whitespark ← **Name**
Categories: Web Design, Marketing, Advertising [Edit]
10835 64 Ave NW ← **Address**
Edmonton, AB T6H 3B4
(780) 907-0575 ← **Phone**
whitespark.ca = citation
Hours:
Mon-Fri 9 am - 6 pm   (The link is separate - and secondary)

5) Follow the rules of each site. They're usually enforced. If this sounds like a "duh" piece of advice, you're ahead of the game.

6) Put quality over quantity. If your citations are a mess, try to fix as many of them as possible before listing your business on other sites. Keep in mind that the number of citations you have will grow naturally over time - without your direct involvement - because some sites feed business info to others. Bulk will come more easily and naturally if you first spend some time fixing your current citations.

7) Consider paying for listings on sites you've determined are influential and reputable - especially if your better-ranking competitors are listed on them. Don't confine yourself to free listings.

8) Realize that there are some listings you can't delegate completely, because they require owner-verification by phone. ExpressUpdate, LocalEze, Acxiom, CityGrid, and YP are the main ones - the sites you must be listed on and for which you need to do some steps personally.

9) Try to remove any duplicate and near-duplicate listings you encounter.

18 Forest Hills Dental
1815 Dorchester Ave, Dorchester Center, MA 02124   » Map
(617) 436-8800
» Website   » More Info   » Add Photos
Where: St. Marks
What: Dentists

Duplicates

19 Aspen Dental
678 Fellsway, Medford, MA 02155   » Map
(781) 399-5003

» Website   » More Info   » Add Photos
What: Dentists, Dental Hygienists, Prosthodontists & Denture Centers

20 Forest Hills Dental
1815 Dorchester Ave, Dorchester Center, MA 02124   » Map
(617) 436-8800
» Website   » More Info   » Add Photos

10) If you encounter a listing with incorrect NAPW info that's been claimed by someone else (or by you before you forgot your password!), try to claim it and then fix it. If you can't do that, try to get it fixed by sending feedback to the site as a non- business owner. If *that* doesn't work, create a new listing with the correct business info, and try to get the old/incorrect one (the listing you couldn't claim) removed.

 11) Realize that Yext is not a substitute for working on citations manually. It's a good tool to give you the ability to update listings on Yext's network instantly (-ish), and it's good for enhancing those listings, but *it's not a citation-cleanup service*. Yext often leaves duplicate and inconsistent citations on the sites. Also, when you stop paying annually, many of the listings it updated may go back to their pre-Yext state. If you use Yext, you should still manually check each site for duplicate and inconsistent citations (or have someone else do so). This is one area where man often beats machine.

 12) Make absolutely certain your name and address are squeaky-clean compliant with Google's guidelines before you build *any* citations. If you're in violation and need to change either of those items on your Google listing, you don't want to have to redo your citations work later.

 13) Keep backups of whatever worksheet you use to keep track of your citations and logins. (There's a great post on Moz by Casey Meraz that has a nice example of a citations worksheet.) Keep at least one those copies is somewhere *other* than on your local drive. Preferably you'd keep a backup in the "cloud," by using a service like SugarSync - which is a life-saver, by the way.) Be sure to specify the date in the filename every time you make changes to it, so you know what's the most-recent copy.

 14) Keep track of all your login info for each site, if you keep the logins separate from the worksheet I just described. Here, too, keep your logins backed-up safely. Google Drive is always good for this purpose. The more backups, the better.

 15) Use an email account that you wouldn't mind letting someone else log into, if you ever want or need help with your citations. Ideally it would be an email account on your domain, but if that's not an option, Gmail is OK.

 16) Save the "additional info" (e.g. descriptions, list of services, etc.) that you have used or plan to use for each site. Keep it on Google Drive or in a Word doc or somewhere else you consider safe. You'll want it easily accessible, and you won't want to have to rewrite or try to remember all of it if it pulls a Houdini from your listings.

About This Business *Provided by business*   *What's This?*

Specialties
Some folks would like to try the benefits of chiropractic, but frankly they're just too SCARED! Patients often don't know that there are alternatives to manual manipulation. From 5 day old infants to UPS truck drivers, we're helping folks get back to life.
To find out more, call us up for a free 10 minute consultation on the phone or in the office to find out if we're the right office for you!

Make sure you save this sort of info

History
Established in 2004
Providing care and services for the Monterey community with Low Cost Sports Physicals and donations back to sports programs, Qualified Medical Evaluations (QME's), and DOT Physical Examinations. We also provide monthly community workshops on various topics from Gluten Sensitivity, Weight-Loss, and Trigger-Point Training, to alternative support for Auto-Immune Conditions, Fibromylagia and Chronic Fatigue.

Meet the Business Owner: Troy Brunke DC B.
Dr. Brunke specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of a variety of neuro-musculo-skeletal and metabolic conditions. He has a passion for continuing education and uses Functional Neurology, Brain-Based Therapies, and Metabolic/Nutritional treatments to get his results.
Dr. Brunke is Board Eligible for Diplomate status in Chiropractic Neurology through the American Chiropractic Neurology Board.
He has served two terms as President of the Monterey District's California Chiropractic Association (CCA).
He truly loves what he does!

17) Think long and hard about whether you want to keep running online Yellow Pages -style ads, which often use separate call-tracking numbers. Why? So that when you receive a fat bill at the end of the month, your friendly sales reps can jab their thumbs into their chests and say "*We* sent you 50 calls last month - exactly the number we promised!" But what they don't tell you is that these numbers can kill the consistency of your business info online, and kill your rankings in the process.

18) Use the USPS ZIP Code Lookup to make sure the ZIP code you're using for your citations corresponds to the correct city (i.e. the one you're located in).

19) Never submit a listing to a site before *thoroughly* checking to make sure you're not already listed there. If you're listed and the listing isn't correct, claim and fix it.

20) Don't forget to search for your fax number when you're hunting for incorrect citations. There's a chance you've got some duplicate listings that use your fax number as the main phone number. This may also happen with your toll-free number if you have one.

21) Many businesses have an official corporation name with "INC", "LLC," or some other suffix that isn't part of their less-official DBA. Make sure you know what your official / legal name is and that you also search for listings under that name.

22) Search for your business name in Google MapMaker. This can often reveal duplicates. Search MapMaker for your phone number(s), too.
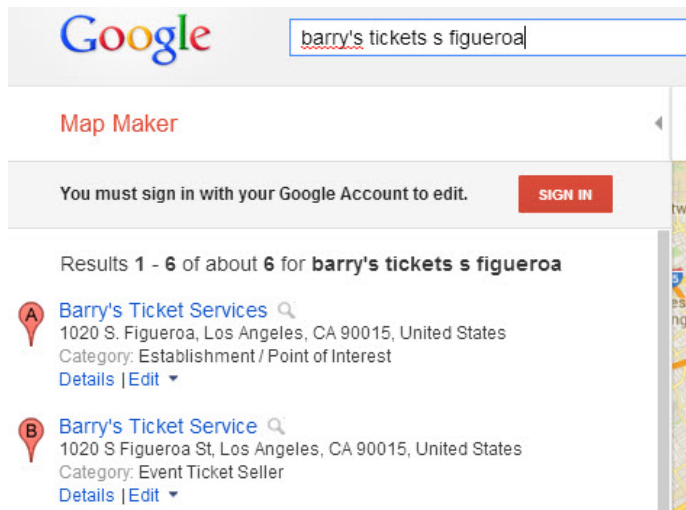
23) When you're checking a site to see if you're listed, don't necessarily enter your full business name into the search box. If you do this and if the site's search feature isn't very robust, you might not find listings where the name isn't 100% correct (which are precisely the ones you'll want to uncover). For example, if your business is "Acme Dynamite Co.," you should generally search for "Acme Dynamite" or "Acme" or even just "Dynamite," so that you know you're finding all the variations on your name.

24) Don't rely solely on the built-in search feature on each site. Especially if you have more than one DBA floating around, you'll want to check a given site for your listing(s) by Googling your DBA + the name of the directory site. That can turn up listings that the built-in search feature on some sites didn't pick up. Using a Google "site:" search (AKA an advanced operator) for a portion of your business name or for your phone number can sometimes uncover listings that the on-site search didn't reveal.

site:yellowpages.com closet tec inc

Web   Images   Maps   Shopping   More ▾   Search tools

About 12,300 results (0.21 seconds)

Closet Tec Inc Sarasota, FL, 34233 - YP.com
www.yellowpages.com › ... › Closets & Accessories in Sarasota, FL
Get directions, reviews, payment information on **Closet Tec Inc** located at Sarasota,
FL. Search for other Closets & Accessories in Sarasota.

Old, outdated listing discovered

Closet Tec Inc Fort Myers, FL, 33901 - YP.com ↙
www.yellowpages.com/fort-myers-fl/mip/**closet-tec-inc**-470779717?... ▾
Get directions, reviews, payment information on **Closet Tec Inc** located at Fort Myers,
FL. Search for other Closets & Accessories in Fort Myers.

25) Google your phone number. Are there any search results that come up for businesses *other than* yours? Do the same for your business name, and for your address (if your business is the only one located at that address). You may find citations that need fixing.

26) Be as consistent as possible in entering your NAPW (name / address / phone / website) info, but don't worry about minor formatting inconsistencies from site to site (like "Ave" vs. "Avenue"). They're unavoidable, and they won't hurt your Google rankings. Just be consistent in what you feed the sites, but realize they may spit it out in slightly different ways - and that's OK.

27) Start off with the data-aggregators or main data-providers (depends on what country you're in). In general, start your citation-building campaign with the bigger, more-important sites, and work your way down to the dinky sites 99% of humanity hasn't heard of.

28) Speaking of data-aggregators, Factual is growing in importance. Make sure you're listed there. It's also a great place to check for citation inconsistencies because it will show you the sources of your incorrect listings.

29) Try to claim / owner-verify your listings whenever possible. Not because the mere act of doing so will help your rankings - it won't. Rather, you'll want to claim your listings because you can often add additional info to your listing, and because it's just easier to make changes, especially later on.

30) Take your time with picking out categories. Don't skimp. Always select as many *relevant* categories as you can on each site. This will not only help your visibility on those sites, but it can also help your Google+ Local rankings (perhaps more so than ever before, now that Google has done away with "custom" categories).

Pacific Landscaping & Tree Services
★★★★★ 1 review

Categories: Landscaping, Landscape Architects, Tree Services [Edit]

801 Lighthouse Ave
Monterey, CA 93940   **Categories: pick 'em wisely**
Serving Monterey and surrounding area

(831) 521-5960
pacificgardenlandscaping.com

31) Don't use a forwarding URL. It's allowed on most directory sites, but it's not allowed in Google+ Local. You don't want inconsistency between the URL you use for your Google listing and the URL you use with your citations.

 32) Don't skimp on the "extra details" (e.g. "services," keywords," photos, etc.). Google looks at this third-party info when trying to figure out exactly what your business is and what you offer and how to rank you. Also, you need to remember that every site where you have a citation - no matter how runty the site seems - can represent a little trickle of potential customers. Take a few extra minutes to make those citations really count.

 33) Use an autofill tool, but still double-check your info to make sure it's been entered correctly. (Chrome Autofill, RoboForm, or LastPass, are good form-filling applications.)

 34) What should you do if you have a bunch of listings on one site and *none* of them has completely accurate NAPW info? Start by claiming one of the listings. Try to claim the one that has the *most*-accurate NAPW info. If they're all in equally bad shape, pick the one that has the most reviews, or that comes up highest in the site's search results when you search for your business by name. Fix that listing up 100%. Then try to get the others removed.

 35) Be paranoid about typos - even if you use an autofill tool. After you enter your info into a site, read over and double-check your basic info.

 36) Have *all* your passwords contain an upper-case letter and at least one number. Do this even for sites that don't require that you do so. Why? Because this will allow you to use the same password on every site. So use a password in the format "ABCxyz123," rather than "abcxyz" or "abcxyz123." 8 characters is a good length; some sites don't even allow longer passwords. Obviously, you'll still want to guard your password carefully, but at least you won't be making it unnecessarily difficult for *you* to remember.

37) If the NAPW info that shows publicly your Google Places/Plus page is formatted slightly differently from the info you entered into the "dashboard" of your Google listing, do NOT go changing around all of your citations to match Google's formatting. For instance, let's say you put "123 Main St." into your Google Places/Plus dashboard, but the way Google shows it publicly on your listing is "123 Main *Street*." You don't need to change your citations to read "Street" instead of "St." Not that you'd be able to anyway; each site has different formatting rules. Also, as I've mentioned, Google is "smart" enough to be able to know that "St." and "Street" mean the same thing. The same is true of phone numbers: Some sites want dashes, others want parentheses.

 38) It's OK to specify "alternate" phone numbers and fax numbers on sites that provide you with such fields. It won't mess up your NAPW consistency.

 39) If you're located at a suite #, be consistent in how you enter the address when you're given two "address" fields and when you're only given one line to specify the address.

 40) Don't try to do all the citations at once. Either do them in waves, or work on a few every day. It takes time - usually *at least* a month or two - to get listed on all the sites that matter, or to fix listings on those sites.

 41) On the other hand, don't worry about how quickly you build citations. It's fine if you do a bunch at once, and it's fine if you nibble at them over time. It won't make a difference to your rankings.

 42) Monitor your citations, and your competitors'. Oh, and wouldn't you know it, Whitespark includes a handy citation monitoring service with their Local Citation Finder.

43) Never let more than a few months go by without doing an audit of your citations - so you know which ones are OK and which still need fixing . You might be surprised at what you'll find, even after you've put in a ton of work and followed these best-practices. Don't rely solely on "free scan" tools, either. They don't always uncover the issues you might want to fix.

About the Guy Who Wrote This

Phil Rozek runs LocalVisibilitySystem.com, a resource for business owners who need more local visibility. Phil can be your very own local-search *consigliere*, or you can apply the info in his blog posts and other resources to gain an edge in the local turf war.

Note from Darren: As you can tell from this post, Phil Rozek is one of the sharpest guys in local search. You really should read everything he writes on his blog and follow him on Twitter.