



# Ranking in Google Places

A Definitive Guide by Josh Garner

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First, we want to thank you for downloading the “Ranking in Google Places” guide. We hope that you will find it useful in generating more, quality traffic to your site. Once you've read this guide and have implemented its suggestions, you will no doubt see a positive impact on your Google Places listing success.

When reading this guide though, it's important to know that Google is always enhancing their Places search engine, and will continue to do so. For example, since the original writing of this guide, Google Places success depends heavily on the optimization and promotion efforts of a main site; and a lot of the methods used to promote a site locally will also impact your Google Places rankings.

In any event, the information you find in this guide will take you through the setup, optimization and promotion of your Google Places page, as well as show you some ways you can promote both your website and your Places listing locally.

Now, on to the guide.

Thank you again,

Josh Garner

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# Table of Contents

What is Google Places?.....	5
And why should I care?.....	6
Before We Get Started.....	7
Know The Rules.....	7
Know Your Business.....	8
2 Ways Google Collects Listing Data.....	9
Third Party Sites.....	9
Direct Submissions.....	9
Search for Your Business .....	10
Finding Your Business .....	10
What if You Find Your Business?.....	10
Getting Listed.....	11
Adding Your Listing.....	11
Claiming An Existing Listing.....	14
Input/Edit Your Business Details.....	14
The Verification.....	14
How to Get Higher Rankings.....	15
3 Determining Factors.....	15
Detailed Information.....	16
City Center Proximity.....	16
Citations and Reviews.....	16
Visible Consistency.....	16
Website.....	17
Third Party Listings.....	19
Advanced Strategies.....	21
A Warning.....	22
Enhancing your Listing.....	22
Categories.....	22
Additional Details.....	23
Linking to your site.....	23
Images.....	24
The Competition.....	24
Study their listings.....	24
Get their citations.....	25
Location Issues.....	25
Troubleshooting.....	26
Incorrect information.....	27
Duplicate listings.....	27
Rankings dropped.....	30
I Swear it's not Spam.....	31
What Next.....	31
Stay in the know.....	32
Hire a professional .....	32



## What is Google Places?

Google Places is a business listing page within Google's Maps service. Within Google Maps, a user can find products or services offered by local businesses; as well as transportation directions and business information.

The business information shown to a user within Google Maps is the product of the information compiled and retrieved from Google Places (or the business' "Place Page").

If you've ever conducted a search at Google.com, you've probably already been exposed to Google Places. You'll know this by the incorporation of a map and a set of listings when you include a city or region within your search.

In fact, recent changes in Google's search engine will now show the Maps listings with a great deal of emphasis; pushing the "organic" listings down the page.

You can see a great example of this on the following screenshot of a local search conducted in Google:

The screenshot shows a Google search for "jacksonville plumbers". The search bar contains the text "jacksonville plumbers" and a red arrow points to it with the text "A local search is conducted". Below the search bar, it says "About 357,000 results (0.28 seconds)". To the right of the search bar is a "Search" button and "Instant is on" with a dropdown arrow. Below the search bar, there are several organic search results. The first result is "Area's Best Plumbers" from www.ServiceMagic.com, with a red arrow pointing to it and the text "A map is included". The second result is "\$40 Off Plumbing Services" from www.FloridaHomePlu. Below these are three "Google Places Listings" for plumbers in Jacksonville, FL, each with a red location pin icon and a "Place page" link. The first listing is for "Jacksonville Plumbers" by David Gray Plumbing, Inc., with address 8850 Corporate Square Court, Jacksonville, and phone (904) 724-7211. The second listing is for "Jacksonville Plumbers - Plumbing Repair, Septic Systems, Septic ..." by Metro Rooter, with address 8892 Normandy Blvd, Jacksonville, and phone (904) 695-1911. The third listing is for "Jacksonville, FL Plumbers, Jacksonville, FL Plumbing Company ..." by Roto-Rooter, with address 2028 West 21st Street, Jacksonville, and phone (904) 396-4679. To the right of the search results is a map of Jacksonville, FL, showing numerous red location pins indicating the locations of plumbers. Below the map is a "Sponsored links" section with three ads: "David Gray Plumbing, Inc.", "Find Local Plumbers", and "Compare Licensed Budget Plumbers".

As you can see, the listings from Google Maps take up the majority of the results page. And each of these listings is created by a Google Places listing.

## **And why should I care?**

Google states that 1 out of 5 searches on Google is related to a location. It is difficult to know just how many searches that comes out to, but it's been estimated that Google provides results for more than 2 billion searches every day. That's more than 400 million local searches every day conducted by people looking for something in their area.

So, if you own a business that provides services or products to consumers in your local area, and you need to gain more visibility to those consumers online, then Google Places is where you need to be.

Furthermore, we've noticed that not only does a well-ranking Google Places listing send a lot of traffic to a website (more than organic listings in many cases), but the traffic from Google Places often converts at a much higher rate than organic traffic.

Sure, it becomes a bit more difficult and time-consuming as competition increases, or in areas of high population (just imagine having a client in New York...who owns a pizzeria), but most small business owners should be able to handle most of the process of making a Google Places listing work well for their business.

Even if you simply don't have the time and you decide to hire someone to take care of your Google Places listing, then you should at least understand the process. By understanding your Google Places listing and the ranking factors that come into play, you can hire the best person or firm to get the job done.

Before we can jump in, there is just one more thing we need to cover.

## Before We Get Started

Any time you're dealing with Google, it's a good idea to understand what it is they are looking for when they return results to a user. In the case of Google Places, there are 2 major points we need to make so your business gets the best, maximum exposure; and ensures that Google regards your listing in a positive fashion.

### Know The Rules

Google has a history of being the best at fighting spam on their search engine, and Google Places is no different. Google has a set of guidelines in place to ensure listings are ranked based on their relevance, and not their ability to game the system.

As such, it's a good idea to make yourself aware of these guidelines. You can read them, and more helpful articles at the Google Places help page:

<http://www.google.com/support/places/>

Generally speaking, don't try to trick Google. They don't like it. And when they catch a bad listing, they remove it completely or penalize it. Once one of those things happens, you have to start over.

You may be thinking that there is some method that is working, or have been told of something that someone is doing to get higher rankings. After this guide, there will be a few sections on additional information regarding Google Places, a section of which we will use to discuss the reasons those methods don't work. If they are working right now, we'll give you a few real-world cases as a warning against relying on short-term gains.

### Know Your Business

Another interesting thing about Google; they love data. They built a business around the collection, categorization and retrieval of data. In order to ensure Google makes the best decision on returning results to a user, you'll need to provide to them as much relevant information as you can.

Following is a list of things you'll need during the creation/modification of your Google Places listing. Get them all together now so you won't have to scramble around later when you are asked for it.

- **The official business name** – This is the exact name of the business. Try to stay away from unofficial acronyms or shortened names.
- **Physical Address** – PO Boxes don't work. And you will need this later when we get your listing to rank.
- **Phone Number** – Gather all the phone numbers you need. Toll and fax included.
- **Email address** – You will need an email address to list in your Google Places listing. Keep in mind that people may use this to contact you.
- **Website Address** – You don't need a website to have a Google Places listing, but it will help a lot when we start looking at ranking the listing. Plus, you really need a website.
- **Business Category** – We will go over the details later, but start thinking about the categories that might define your business.
- **Gather Images** – Take pictures of your business and any items that might apply to the definition of your products/services. For example, if you own a bakery, a few shots of cupcakes wouldn't hurt.
- **Gather Videos** – If you have them, get them together. Instructional videos are best, but information/commercial videos will do fine.
- **Gather Additional Details** – Aside from categories, you can also list details that apply to your business. Do you carry certain brands of products? How about specific services provided? Start thinking about these.
- **Locations** - All of the above points apply for each location you have. This isn't too big of a deal if you only have a few listings around town; it gets interesting if you have hundreds across the nation.

## 2 Ways Google Collects Listing Data

The information provided in Google Maps is the result of 2 main data-gathering methods.

### Third Party Sites

Google will sometimes rely on the information provided on third-party websites with business listings. They crawl the sites, find business listings and pull them into Google Maps.

Obviously, Google has the ability to crawl a very large portion of the Internet and harvest a great deal of information. And there is plenty of it out there for Google's taking.

More often than not, your business is probably listed on many websites. Usually, this is the result of a business listing data center getting your business' information from public listings of your company, and sharing it among other directories. These are what we call “feeder directories.” We'll talk about them more in coming sections, but for now just know that once you start a business, it is also listed somewhere publicly, ensuring that it will eventually be shared across the Internet.

Remember this, as it is often the cause of a lot of problems in Google Places, like incorrect business information and duplicate listings. We will also talk about how to remedy those types of problems after the guide.

### Direct Submissions

The other manner in which Google might receive and list your business is by acquiring the information directly from a business owner. Because the listing is being created by the owner of the company (or an authorized individual), Google will take the direct submission and the information provided as more authoritative.

Being that other websites could be incorrect or out-dated, the information you provide directly to Google will always take priority. At least, this is what they claim. There are cases where this isn't true, and we will talk about those cases and solutions in later sections. For now, let's just get your business in there.

## Search for Your Business

We need to first see if your business is already listed in Google Places. If it is, we need to make sure there aren't any problems like duplicate listings or incorrect information.

### Finding Your Business

Searching for a Google Places page is simple enough. Simply go to <http://maps.google.com> and search for the name of your business.

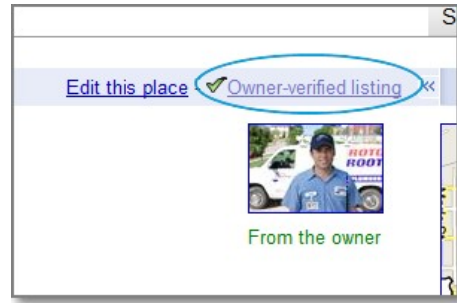
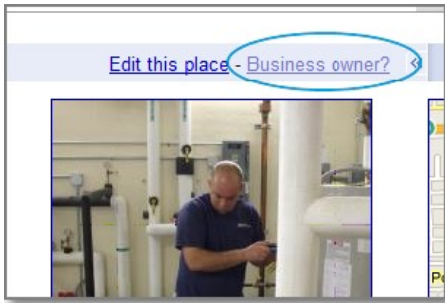
It's a good idea to search for more than just the business name though. Try your street address and phone number. Also, go ahead and try a few “common” searches one of your customers might make. If you still don't see any listings for your business, it's probably not in there.

Google will also do a search for you when you first begin the claiming process, and if they find similar listings they will let you know.

### What if You Find Your Business?

If you find a listing for your business, then there are a few things we need to look at. Take a look at all of the information on the listing's Place page and note any corrections that need to be made. Also, see if there are more listings, and make a note of those as well.

When you're looking at the Place page, you should see a link in the upper-right corner (almost the exact middle of the screen). The link will either say “Business owner?” or “Owner-verified listing.”



If your listing has the “Business owner?” link, then nobody has claimed ownership of this Place page yet. However, if the page you are looking at has the “Owner-verified listing” link, then somebody claimed that listing. Don't worry too much. This could just mean that someone in your company has already claimed the listing. Ask around the office to make sure.

If your business was claimed, but not by anyone in your organization, then it means that someone claimed the listing, and not likely for honorable reasons. Take a closer look at the listing, and you may notice that the phone number or website address is incorrect.

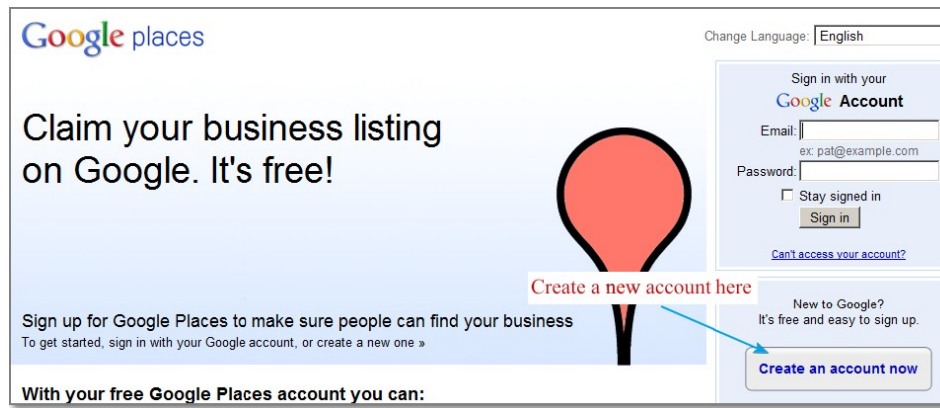
No matter. Whether your business has a listing or not, you will soon be taking ownership.

## Getting Listed

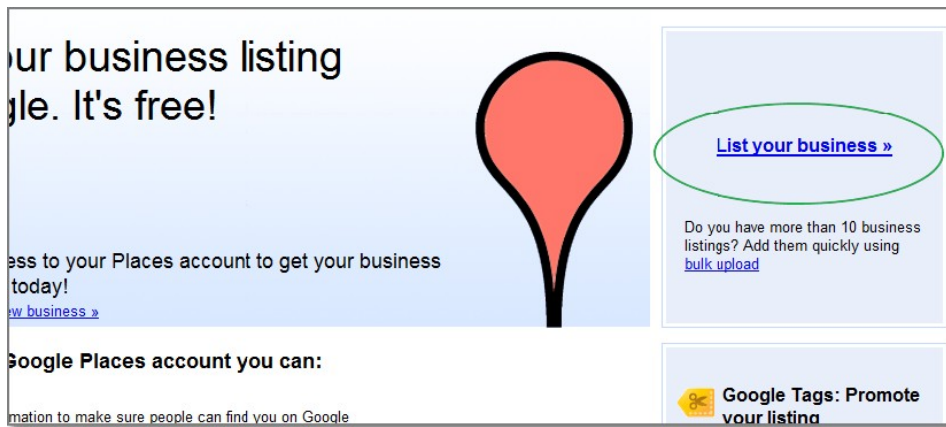
Now we will get on to the good stuff. Getting your business listed in Google Places or taking ownership of a listing that already exists.

## Adding Your Listing

If you didn't find your listing, then you'll need to add it to Google directly. Simply go to <http://google.com/places> and you will be met with a login screen. If you don't already have a Google account login, then you'll have to create a new account.



Once you've created an account and are able to login, the screen will look more like this:



Once you click the link to “[List your business](#),” you will be asked for your phone number. This will prompt Google to check for any current listings that are similar. If there are, you will get the following screen:

As you can see, Google seems to have found a listing with the phone number we used for our listing. If this is your business, you can simply click the “[Edit](#)” button to continue. If this isn't your business, click the “[Add a new listing](#)” button.

## Claiming An Existing Listing

If you found a listing during your initial search, you just have to click the “[Business owner?](#)” link, and the process will continue as normal.

## Input/Edit Your Business Details

The next screen is where you will input all the information about your business. This includes common information like address and phone numbers, but also allows you to upload images and videos, define

categories and specify other policies like accepted payment methods and business hours:

**Basic Information**

Please note that changing your address or business name will require additional verification via mail or phone.

Country: \*

Company/Organization: \*

Street Address: \*

City/Town: \*

State: \*

ZIP: \*

Main phone: \*   
Example: (201) 234-5678 [Add more phone numbers](#)

Email address:   
Example: myname@example.com

Website:   
Example: http://www.example.com  
 I don't have a website.

Description:   
200 characters max, 200 characters left.

Category: \*   
Which categories (up to 5) best describe your business?

904-993-7796

©2010 Google - [Terms of Use](#)  
[Fix incorrect marker location](#)

In the next section we will discuss each portion of information in detail, but for now just be as comprehensive as you can in filling out this form.

As you fill the form out, you will notice that the map on the right updates with each piece of your address completed. When you're done with your address, make sure the marker is in the correct location, and continue to the next part of the process.

## The Verification

The next step is to verify the listing. This is a measure taken by Google to ensure that you are in fact authorized to create and manage the Google Places listing. This can be done in one of three ways.

- **Postcard** – Selecting this option will prompt Google to send a postcard to the address you specified with an include PIN. When you finally receive this card (usually in about 3 weeks) head back to your listing and input the PIN provided.
- **Phone Call** – This option will cause Google to call the phone number you provided with a recorded system providing your PIN. This usually takes about 10 seconds.
- **Text Message** – Google also offers you the option of receiving a text message with your

verification PIN included. Again, this takes just a few moments.

Whichever method you choose is up to you. Remember though, that if you choose postcard verification that the card sent by Google looks very similar to junk mail. Many of these cards have ended up in the trash prematurely.

Also, the method you choose to verify will have an impact on changes you make in the future. If you use your phone number to verify the listing and update that phone number later, you will have to re-verify. The same goes for the postcard method if you happen to change locations.

That's the setup part. Once these things are taken care of, you are ready for the fun part. The optimization of the account in order to gain rankings and traffic to your listing and further to your website or store.

## How to Get Higher Rankings

Obviously, creating a listing isn't enough. You need to ensure that your listing is getting as much relevant traffic as is possible. To do this we need to understand the 3 major factors used by Google to determine your listing's rankings.

### 3 Determining Factors

Though there are many small factors that help your listing rank, they can all be summed up into 3 major areas of focus.

#### Detailed Information

All else being equal, a comprehensive listing will rank higher than that of little information. We've seen time and time again a listing with just the basic information filled out. Once the details are completed, rankings improve almost immediately.

#### City Center Proximity

Though the importance of this factor seems to have tapered off a bit, your location in relation to the

center of the city or region is important as well. However, if all else fails there are ways to enhance your address to be closer to the center of the city without moving your whole business. We will discuss that in a later section.

## Citations and Reviews

If we were to compare this whole process to SEO, then your Google Places listing would be your website. If that's the case, then reviews and citations are like your inbound links. And we know that quality inbound links are of very high importance to any SEO campaign.

A citation is simply a listing for your business on another site, including the business name, phone number and address. The only thing that really makes this different than traditional link-building is that we aren't looking for places from which we can get a link to our site. Rather, we simply need places that will list our business with the address and phone number we provide.

Any site that allows a user to submit a review of your product or service will also play a role in your rankings. Google, wanting to have all the information they can, will crawl review sites and include some reviews in your Google Places page.

It is also possible for a user to leave reviews of your product or service directly on your Google Places page. The more the better. On that same note, you can also respond to reviews withing Google Places, and it's a good idea to do so for both good and bad reviews.

## Visible Consistency

With regard to the city center, there's a workaround, but it only works in certain situations. But for reviews, citations and data completion, we can lump this into something we call Visible Consistency; and that is something on which we can have a direct impact.

Visible Consistency can be broken down into 2 thoughts. We need to increase the visibility of your business information on the web, and we need to ensure that the information is consistent.

## Website

Your business' online visibility begins with your website. And because you listed your website in your Google Places listing, it's important that your information is easily found and read, and that it is

consistent with what you provided to Google.

## Real Text

It's important that Google can read your address from your site, and they can't do this if your site consists of only images or Flash. This holds true for traditional SEO as well, but for now let's just make sure your address is in "real" text.

Even if your site is image-heavy or built in Flash, there's no reason your address can't be included on your site in the footer in a readable format. Your solution may vary, but the end result should be the same. If you need help with this part, contact your webmaster or website designer.

## Address on Every Page

If you provide products or services to your local area, it's a good idea to have your address on every page of your site. Again, placing it in the footer should be just fine.

## Microformatting

While we are on your website, let's discuss microformatting. Microformats are just a way of identifying pieces of data for easy retrieval and use. There are several microformats that can be used in several different ways, but for now we are going to talk about the hCard.

Wherever the HTML for your address resides on your site, you can use hCard microformatting to identify that piece of the page as the business information. All you have to do is surround pieces of your information with certain tags.

For example, where your telephone number appears on your page, you would surround it with the following tag:

```
<div class="tel">555-555-5555</div>
```

The simplest way to have the hCard format generated for you is to go to the following site, and input as much of your information as is relevant.

<http://microformats.org/code/hcard/creator>

Once you have the raw code, you can incorporate it into your site with added CSS or editing for

aesthetics. Again, you may want to talk to your webmaster or website designer, but this isn't too difficult at all.

There are other microformats that you may want to look into while you're on their site. For example, the hReview format can be used by hotels to list rooms, rates, etc. We've seen Google pull this into Maps on several occasions.

## KML and Geo Sitemaps

While we are looking at the code for your site, might as well knock out one more detail. Google uses another format and file to show locations on their Google Earth and Google Maps engine. The files you will need to create are a KML file, and a XML file. The KML file will reside on your websites hosting location, and the XML file will be uploaded to Google Webmaster tools.

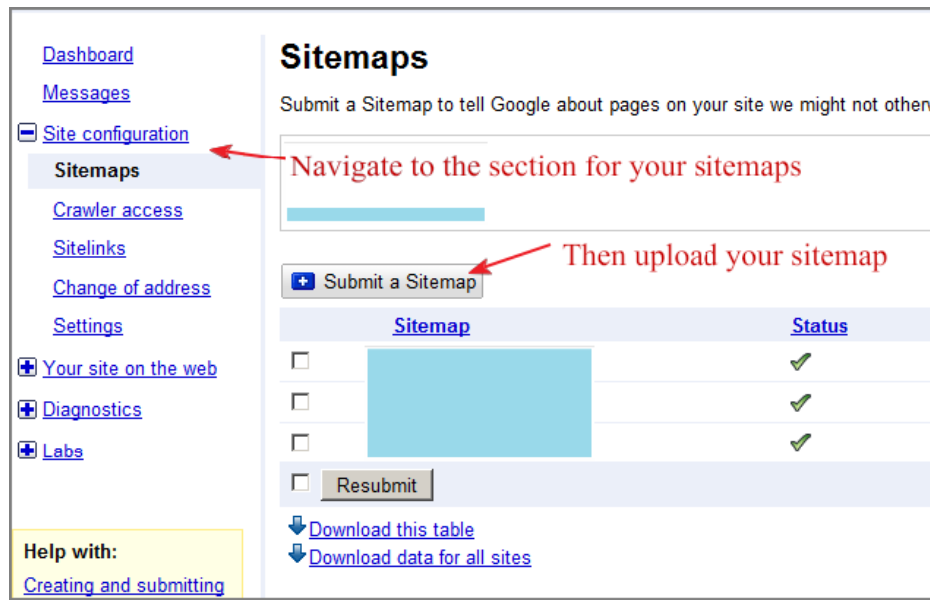
Creating a KML file is similar to creating your microformat, but you won't have to mess with any code yourself. You can simply go to the following link for a generator. Just input your information, and you will be provided with both of the files you need.

<http://www.geositemapgenerator.com/>

Once you have the files, upload the KML file to a location on your hosting account. Then, head over to Google Webmaster Tools (<http://www.google.com/webmasters/>).

If you haven't verified your site yet, might as well do that now. It's a simple process and shouldn't take but a few moments.

Within Google Webmaster Tools, you will be able to upload sitemaps for your site. There are several options you have on that front (sitemap for the pages of your site, images, videos, etc.) but for now we are just going to upload the geositemap you generated:



## Third Party Listings

Another way in which we can increase our visibility and consistency is to increase the number of mentions your business has on other websites. This can include submitting your business to an online directory, or creating a social media profile for your business.

Let's go over some of the most common methods and work to more detailed ways to increase your business' online visibility.

### Directories

Directory submissions are a common way most websites use to increase links. The problem is that there are so many directories (most of which add little to no value to your website), you could spend a lot of time invested in an activity that isn't bringing results. In order to get the best return on your time investment, limit your directory submissions to the most valuable.

### Local/Niche Directories

With regard to local business exposure, you'll want to focus on local directories, and directories that focus on your business type.

Yellow Page-type directories are great for getting business listings. There are a lot of great sites like these, but these should get you started:

[Yellopages.com](http://Yellopages.com)  
[CitySearch.com](http://CitySearch.com)  
[Local.com](http://Local.com)  
[SuperMedia.com](http://SuperMedia.com)  
[TrueLocal.com](http://TrueLocal.com)  
[ZoomInfo.com](http://ZoomInfo.com)  
[YP.com](http://YP.com)  
[YellowBook.com](http://YellowBook.com)

As you submit to these types of directories, you will come across a few that will list your basic information for free, but require a small fee to include a link to your website. A link to your site is always a good idea, and if it's in your budget then I say go for it. But for the purpose of your Google Places listing, we are trying to increase mentions of our business name with consistent contact information.

To find a niche directory, you can do a few simple searches in Google to get a list. Copy each of these searches (and modify them to fit your business) and put it in Google. You will be returned a list of sites that should get you started.

<business type> directory  
<business type> directories  
<service> directory  
<service> directories  
<business type> “submit url”  
<business type> “submit website”  
<business type> “submit your business”

There are also directories from which other directories pull information. These are what we call “feeder directories.” These are large data providers from which even Google receives its information for business listings. The following are the most important:

[InfoUSA](http://InfoUSA)  
[Axiom](http://Axiom)  
[Localeze](http://Localeze)

These data providers are very important. If the information they have is incorrect, it will be fed to thousands of other places, and can sometimes override what you provide to Google.

When you submit your business to these types of directories, you are also placing your business in a position to be reviewed by your past customers. As these reviews grow, so will your citations and so your rankings in Google Places.

## Social Media Profiles

If you haven't already, it would be a good idea to create profiles for your business (and consider a social media marketing campaign on some level). Sites like Facebook and Twitter are a great way to increase your company's visibility, communicate with your customers and open another avenue for marketing. Within your profile, you will be able to include information about your services or products, and include your company's contact information.

But you don't have to stop there. Whatever your business, it's likely that there are social networking sites dedicated to conversations revolving around your industry.

For example, let's say you are a personal chef. Sites like [wearechefs.com](http://wearechefs.com) and [chefcommons.com](http://chefcommons.com) might be perfect for you. Plus, you'll get to network with other professionals in your industry to trade tips on running your business. It's really a win-win situation.

Whatever social sites you choose to frequent, just be sure to include as much information about your business as possible.

By now, you've pretty much covered your bases. Your listing should be comprehensive, you should have a listing in major directories and you've taken some measure to induce reviews on your listing. Your site should be in line with your local search strategy, and you should see some improvement.

However, this is a basic process, and doesn't always cut it for businesses in highly populated areas or which are competitive in nature. If you've given all the points attention so far, and still aren't seeing results within a few weeks then it's time to kick things up a bit.

## Advanced Strategies

Following are a few sections based on the strategies we use when we take on a client that resides in a

heavily populated area or is in an industry with a high amount of competition.

Sometimes it requires doubling down on your efforts, digging deeper into your competition or cleaning up mistakes you may have made along the way.

Whatever the case, the following are examples of common issues we've seen and how we've remedied them. When it comes to these situations, you just have to think outside the box sometimes.

## **A Warning**

One more thing before we get into more advanced tactics. When you take the following steps, keep in mind that we are doing so in an attempt to provide Google with as much, detailed information as we can. What we are not trying to do is sneak in a keyword or otherwise trick our way to higher rankings.

In a few sections we will talk about analyzing your competition, and it will be tempting to implement some tactics they are using. It's important to distinguish the difference between correlation and causation; in that, they may be ranking, and they may be spamming, but they probably aren't ranking because they are spamming.

And even if they are (and in a lot of cases they are), those sorts of tactics don't usually last long. Google has built an extremely profitable business on providing relevant information to users of the Internet, and they take great care to protect that service.

Put simply, it isn't worth a short-term gain at the risk of a long term generation of quality traffic to your site or store.

## **Enhancing your Listing**

The first thing we need to do is take a deeper look at the listing in Google. We want to tackle each piece separately, providing as much detailed information as we can.

### **Categories**

Right after filling out all of the basic information on your business, you are provided an opportunity to classify your own business by selecting relevant categories.

You first search for a relevant category by search for your type of business. Google will begin to populate a list of their available categories from which you may choose.

To take it a step further, there may be some categories that Google has, but you aren't aware of. For that you can use the following tool to find relevant categories. Just type in your category and you'll get a list of relevant categories that Google has to offer.

[http://www.blumenthals.com/index.php?Google\\_LBC\\_Categories](http://www.blumenthals.com/index.php?Google_LBC_Categories)

You can also choose to input a custom category if you can't find something specific enough offered by Google. But you're treading on tricky ground now, and there are a few things to consider.

When providing a custom category, resist the urge to use keywords in an attempt to rank for them. This will throw a red flag and could get your listing penalized.

Don't place the city in your categories either. This is already figured out by Google in your listing information, and including here will be considered spam.

### **Additional Details**

You can also specify specific details about the products or services you offer in the “Additional Details” section. There are 2 columns, the first for the Detail, and the second for information on that detail.

For example, a hotel could list their check in and check out times by putting “Check In” in the first row of the first column and the time in the first row of the second column; then placing “Check Out” in the second row of the first column, and the time in the second row of the second column:

Check In	:	8:00 am	<input type="button" value="X"/>
Check Out	:	9:00 AM	<input type="button" value="X"/>
<a href="#">Add another</a>			

You can get pretty creative with this list, but again try to resist the urge to spam these fields. The more you can offer the better, but if there is already a place for such information then there is no need to

repeat it here.

## Linking to your site

You can actually place links to specific pages on your site using the “Additional Details” fields. For example, see how we linked to specific service pages on our site?

SEO Services Page	:	<a href="http://seo-factor.com/internet-marke">http://seo-factor.com/internet-marke</a>	✕
PPC Management Services Page	:	<a href="http://seo-factor.com/internet-marke">http://seo-factor.com/internet-marke</a>	✕
SEO Blog	:	<a href="http://seo-factor.com/blog/">http://seo-factor.com/blog/</a>	✕
<a href="#">Add another</a>			

You can see that once these links are created, they will appear on our listing:

Details	
<b>Area served:</b> Jacksonville, FL, USA - <a href="#">Show</a>	<b>Price Type:</b> Negotiable, Monthly Available
<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:josh.g@seo-factor.com">josh.g@seo-factor.com</a>	<b>SEO Services Page:</b> <a href="#">SEO Services Page</a>
<b>Speciality:</b> On-Page Optimization, SEO, PPC,	<b>PPC Management Services Page:</b> <a href="#">PPC Management Services Page</a>
<b>Business owner</b>	
<a href="#">More details »</a>	

I wouldn't suggest going overboard, but it's a good way to direct people to the best place on your site.

Only use this to point to different services and products on your site, not for different locations. For example, if a property management group manages several hotels, but only one website, then you would still want to make a Google Places listing for each property, and list the specific pages in their respective listings.

## Images

You can also enhance your listing with images. Product images, logos, or any other images you can use to showcase your business will do. To ensure they look as best they can, crop your images into squares before uploading. This will prevent stretching of your image; making it look sloppy.

## The Competition

If the competition is especially high, then what better place to research than the listings of your competitors.

### Study their listings

Study the listings of your competitors and note the things they are doing that you aren't. Are they including specific products on their listing? Have they found categories that you hadn't?

We are just looking for opportunities or ideas that we may have missed when enhancing our listing.

### Get their citations

Another way in which we can use the competition would be to find the sites on which they have listings (or “citations”). By finding the citations of your competitors, and working to attain the same citations, we can at least even the odds

Luckily, there's a tool to help us find the citations our competitors have acquired, and help us keep track as we attempt to get the same citations. Head over to the following site, and create register for an account:

<http://www.whitespark.ca/tools/local-citation-finder/register.php>

Once you've done that, you can use this tool to input specific keywords for which you are attempting to rank. This tool will search for that term, find the businesses that rank for those terms in Google Places, and find the sites that have a listing for those businesses.

This tool uses the listed phone number to search for citations, so it may not be all inclusive. And there will be a large number of useless sites that you'll have to skip (like phone number reversal tools, etc.), but this list will give you a clear direction.

Once you've requested a report, you can walk away for a bit. It can take a few minutes to to run, and you will receive an email as soon as it's ready.

Once your report is ready, you can go to the “My search results” tab and get the full list of sites. You

can also check off the sites to which you've submitted, and mark the sites that are of no value.

## **Location Issues**

We promised a tip to help get around the problem of not being close to the center of the city. If yours is a business that doesn't rely on visits from your customers, then you can do the following to get around it.

Do a few searches for some of your desired keywords. Get a feel for what Google considers the center of the city or region. Then, find a FedEx or UPS store in that area that offers a mailbox service. These are just like PO Boxes, but you get a “real” street address.

Unfortunately this won't really work for a restaurant, for example, because that relies on a customer coming to their location. But if you're an independent consultant, or a service provider then this may work well for you.

We've also noticed that Google doesn't hold it against you if you decide to hide your address from your listing. We did this, in fact. However, we are rather close to the center of the city as it is. When we appear in a Maps listing, the marker they use is incorrect, but close to the center of the city. So, you may be able to just hide your address and see what happens.

## Troubleshooting

Try as you might, it seems a lot of people are having problems with their listings these days. Some of these problems seem to have been on Google's end, likely as a result of recent spam-fighting efforts.

Here are some of the most common problems we see, and how we fix them.

### Incorrect information

Sometimes we get listings with incorrect information. Usually this is a phone number or suite number.

The most common culprit is inconsistent listing information on third-party websites, overriding the information you've given to Google. The best thing you can do is go through the process of getting business listings and citations. Ensure that you've submitted to the major feeder sites we listed at the top, as well as the major local directories.

You can also search for the citations your business currently has on other sites. It's something of a long process, but if you get a list of some of your citations, you can go through them and make sure the information they have is correct.

Check out this post on finding competitor citations:

<http://ontolo.com/blog/phone-number-co-citation-analysis-local-link-builders>

If you use your phone number instead of that of your competitor's, you can get a decent list of sites that list your business. You can also do a Google search for your company's name in quotations to find business listings.

If there aren't many out there, this isn't too big of a deal. But if you have a lot of incorrect citations out there, then you'll have some work ahead of you.

Another common problem is in situations where more than one party has an interest in your Google Places listing. For example, we've worked with hoteliers who use the Best Western brand. We would claim a listing and within a few weeks, we would notice that the listing was being updated to reflect that of the main Best Western domain. Obviously our client had their own website. We would edit the listing, and again it would change soon after. Turns out Best Western was also claiming ownership of the listings, and when they updated their listings in bulk, they would override what we had done.

Fortunately we were able to work with the brand to find a mutually beneficial solution, but this isn't an uncommon situation; especially when brands and franchises are concerned.

## **Duplicate listings**

Another common problem is that of multiple listing for the same business. Often times we get this handed to us by someone who thought it was a good idea to create multiple listings for the same business. The logic is fair, especially when you see your competition doing the same thing. But it creates problems when you're trying to achieve high rankings.

Also, if Google gets the feeling that you're creating these listings on purpose, you run the risk of a penalty.

Duplicate listings can sometimes be caused by another party creating the listings like the example above. Or it could be another result of inconsistent listing information on third-party websites.

Again, you'll want to ensure that the third-party listings for your business are correct and up-to-date. But there are also a few ways you can take charge and get the duplicate listings removed.

If you can gain control of the listing, then you can go through the process of deleting it from your account, leaving only one left.

If the listing isn't in your account, you can opt to report the problem to Google from within the listing by selecting the “more...” link:

**SEO Factor, LLC** ☆

Jacksonville, FL

(904) 993-7796

[seo-factor.com](http://seo-factor.com)

[Search nearby](#) [Save to...](#) [more](#) ▼

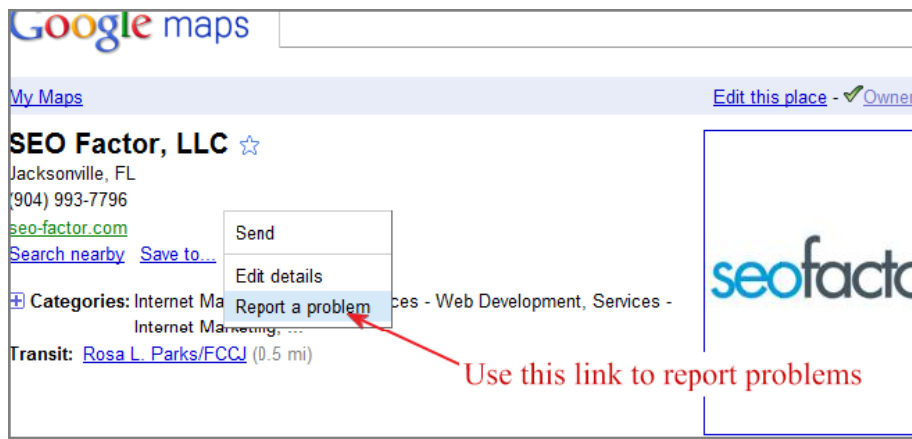
⊕ **Categories:** Internet Marketing Service, Services - Web Development, Services - Internet Marketing, ...

**Transit:** [Rosa L. Parks/FCCJ](#) (0.5 mi)

seo

From the

Then select "Report a problem:"



When you submit the report, send a link to your main listing via the comments. They will eventually sort it out and merge what information they need to (reviews, etc.). They say this process can take several weeks. We've seen it take as long as 6 weeks, and as little as a day.

Google Places is still going through a lot of changes and updates to handle all the data they have and work on their ranking algorithm. That being said, there still seem to be some lingering problems on Google's end that we simply have to let them solve. Duplicate listings and incorrect information are both common problems, and sometimes you have to report the problem and give it some time.

## Rankings dropped

If you've noticed that the rankings for your desired search terms has dropped considerably, it could be a temporary shift in all rankings. Remember that Google Places is a little unstable sometimes, and when they make changes to the system it can have an impact on your rankings. But if yours is the only listing that seems to have dropped, then you may have been stuck with a penalty. I know this sounds like a broken record, but we see this all too often, and all too often it's a simple case of attempting to stuff parts of the listing with keywords.

First, clean up your listing. Make sure you are only providing the most relevant bits of information when and where they are requested. Save your changes and give it a few days. If your rankings haven't returned (or are coming back up) within 2 weeks, then you'll want to move to the next step.

Your next option is to start over. This is usually a last resort solution as you'll have to not only re-create and re-setup your listing (suggested on a whole new Google account), but you'll also have find any duplicate listings (any remnants of your old listings), and handle those appropriately.

## I Swear it's not Spam

There's just one more thing to cover before we wrap up this guide.

There are times when a business may be penalized for practices that go against Google's guidelines, but was following all of those guidelines. The problem arises because Google attempts to handle spam not by relying on people to monitor and correct problems, but algorithmically. Sometimes, the rules defined by the algorithm have a negative impact on legitimate listings.

For example, let's say you own a chain of hotels. In order to distinguish each hotel, you include the city or region in which it resides in the property name. For example, you may call one of your hotels “Super Neat Hotel Miami” and the other “Super Neat Hotel Orlando.”

Because one of Google's guidelines states that you shouldn't attempt to gain rankings by placing your city in the title of your listing (or other fields), you could be flagged for spamming.

Speaking from experience, these situations can cause major problems, especially when you manage more than 100 hotels, a majority of which have become branded hotels (Best Westerns, Marriotts, etc.).

Situations like this require that you hustle just a little bit. We had a lot of contact with Google, submitted many reports, and kept as many lines of communication open with both the hotel owners as well as brand representatives.

When it comes down to it, there are 2 major reasons for problems with your listing. They are either caused by you, or by Google.

In cases where Google has made some sort of mistake, you can report it to them and hope for the best; but you will likely have to be patient.

In cases where you did something to cause the problem, there is always a way to fix it.

## What Next

That pretty much wraps up the guide, but it's important to understand the dynamic nature in which

Google provides its services. They are always changing, and being that Places is relatively new (and extremely important to Google's future), there are sure to be more changes in store for us.

With that being said, we offer the following points of advice.

## **Stay in the know**

This guide is a great step in promoting your local business online. But you can also learn a lot from Google directly by reading the articles they provide within Google Places Help (<http://www.google.com/support/places/?hl=en>). You might be surprised at the amount of detailed advice they are willing to offer.

If you have a specific problem or question, we are usually able to offer a quick word of advice (free of charge, of course). Feel free to email [Support@SEO-Factor.com](mailto:Support@SEO-Factor.com). Believe it or not, most professional Internet marketers share our sentiment, and are willing to answer a few questions here and there. So don't be shy.

Or, you could opt to hire a professional to handle your local search needs. In that case...

## **Hire a professional**

When hiring a professional SEO or Internet marketer, the first bit of advice we always give is “educate yourself.” We hope this guide has served that purpose, but there are plenty of other great resources out there to aid you in seeking the help of an SEO or firm.

Just ask a lot of questions, talk to more than one company if possible and do a little research against what they say.

Also, often times an SEO or firm won't explicitly state on their site that they are “Google Places professionals.” This doesn't mean that they don't have the ability to get the job done. In fact, though it may seem like a heavy undertaking, Google Places is often only a small portion of a proposed strategy.

In fact, a lot of SEO firms handle Google Places as well as Bing Local as a part of a more robust [local SEO package](#) due to its higher returns on investment, and the fact that what helps a Google Places listing usually will also help a business' website directly (attaining links as you build citations, etc.). So

just because they don't offer a specific Google Places service, ask your provider what they are doing anyway. They may already take care of it for you, or have the ability to get started.

As always, try to stay away from guarantees. Google is simply too unpredictable at times, and anyone who makes a gurantee claim is either not qualified to handle your campaign, or is making use of a tactic they found to work. Remember, tactics like that don't work long enough to be the foundation of a long-term strategy.

## **Thank You Again**

Again, we want to thank you for downloading this guide. We hope that it serves you well in driving more traffic to your site and to your business.