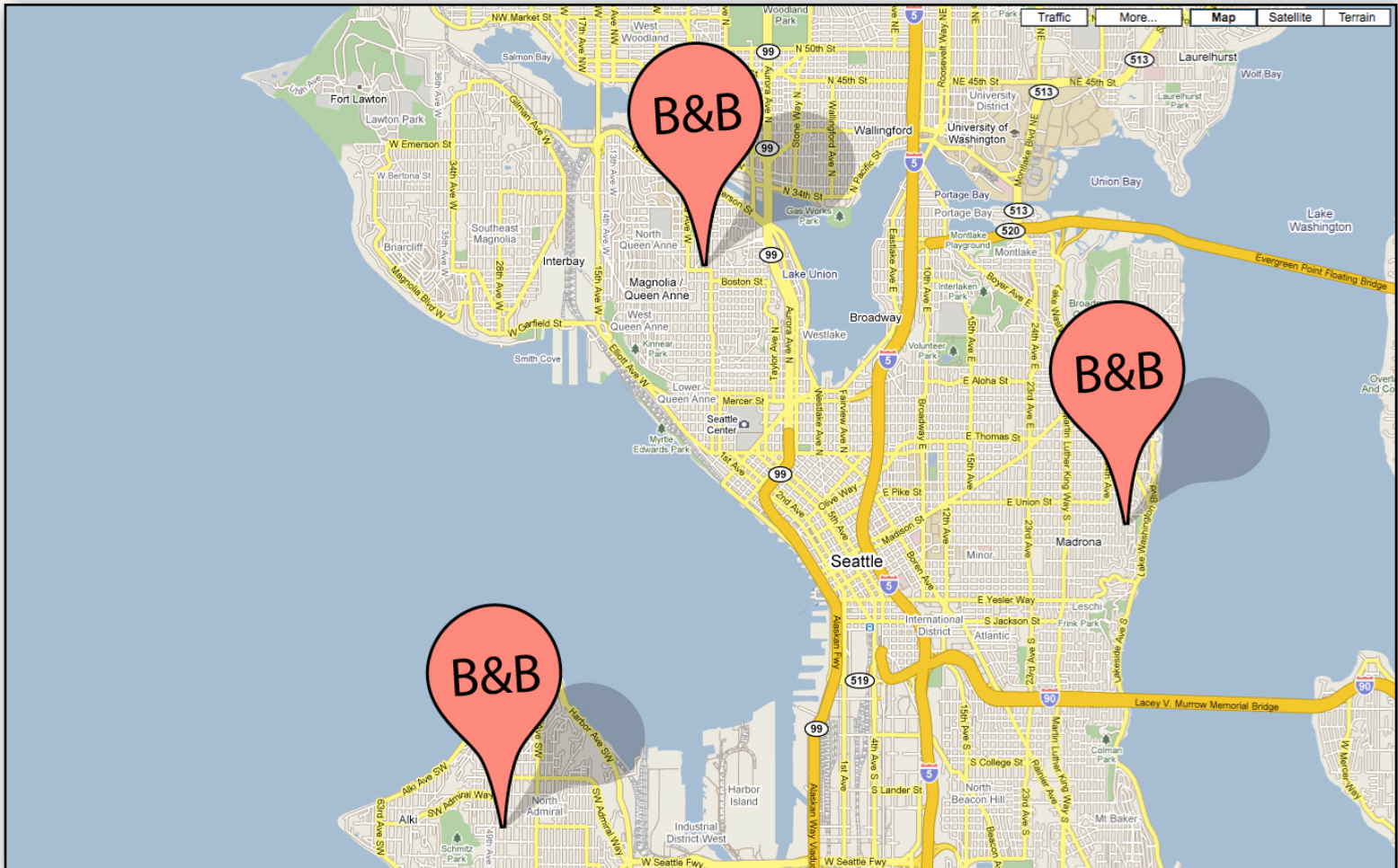


How to get top placement on Google Maps

Get tips and tricks from InsideOut Solutions on how to achieve top placement on Google Maps and Business Listings



The **Local Business Results** widget at the top of a Google Search results is an important place for your inn to have a presence. The algorithm used for Google Maps results is different and even more mysterious than the algorithm used for organic search. This can make it frustrating and confusing for a business owner or marketer to determine how one achieves top results.

This White paper will cover the following:

- What is the Google Business Center and Google Maps?
- Where Google gathers valid information for populating listings
- How to create an accurate Google Local Business listing
- Google Local Business Quality Guidelines
- Google Local Business reporting capabilities

HISTORY

In March of 2004 Google introduced Google Local, offering relevant neighborhood business listings, maps, and directions. (Later, Local is combined with Google Maps.) This was a tool to specify search from Global to local, as well as provide the kind of details you can't get in the yellow pages. For example, a Google Maps listing for a Bar or Lounge can have information about WiFi access, hours, nightly specials, types of credit cards accepted etc.

PRESENT

Five years later Google Local has combined with Google Maps (launched 2/05) and offers satellite views, street views, directions, and ads as well as non-paid results.

WHAT IS GOOGLE MAPS?

Google Maps is a web mapping service application and technology that returns local business listings, Ad servicing as well as a variety of other user tools like directions and Google transit. The *Local Business Center* (LBC) is the main area we will be focusing on in this paper.

There are currently two types of listings served in the Google Maps section:

- Business Listings – Free business listings created from gathered information by Google or by creating a listing in the LBC. These exist for businesses that do not have web sites as well as for those that do.
- Local Business Ads – Sponsored (paid) business ads created in Google Adwords. These ads are part of the Adwords advertising platform. You need to have a web site to run Local Business ads.

There are currently prototypes being tested in San Diego and San Francisco for a new type of ad to be used in Google Maps that would not need to be tied to an Adwords account. If this becomes available more widely, we will include information on this product.

WHERE GOOGLE FINDS BUSINESS INFORMATION

Claiming and including accurate business information for your listing in the LBC is the first step to having your business listed correctly.

There are some places where you must make sure your contact information is accurate that are even more important than Google Maps:

- Your Web site
- Domain registrar
- Yellowpages.com

1. YOUR WEB SITE: Your businesses exact physical address should at least be on a "Contact" page, or preferably on all pages of your site. Obviously, it is essential that this is up-to-date and accurate.

2. DOMAIN REGISTRAR: It is believed that Google Maps cross references your physical address with the information found at your domain registrar. This information can easily slip your mind since it is usually only renewed every 3 to 5 years by your web site manager. You can use the web site *whois.net* to verify that the contact information for your businesses' web site is accurate.

If the information is incorrect, and you do not have your domain login information, see who's email is associated with your domain. You should be able to contact that person or use that address to request your login, or request updates be made.

3. **YELLOW PAGES:** A correct YellowPages.com listing is essential ranking well in Google Maps. Check your listing is correct by performing a search for your business. If there is an error, you can click on "improve this listing" and add or change information.

Changes can occur instantly on your Google listing; but we are seeing it take anywhere between 24 hours to two weeks for some changes to go through.

YOU AND THE GOOGLE LOCAL BUSINESS CENTER (LBC)

The Local Business Center is where owners and marketers can claim, manage and update business listings on Google Maps. These listings are free, and are served when Google decides to put a map widget at the top of an organic search results, or when a Google user selects the "maps" search option.

Claiming this listing and propagating it with accurate business information is going to be a great asset to your visibility online. It will be important to check that a listing does not already exist for your business before creating one. Next we will cover how to claim your listing on Google Maps.

HOW TO CLAIM YOUR LISTING ON GOOGLE MAPS

Google makes this process easy to do. They even have a video online explaining the process, which can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lviDz8fUMTE>

To claim your listing start here: <http://www.google.com/local/add>

BUSINESS NAME: The business name submitted in Google Maps should be the same as the legal business name of your company.

ADDRESS: The address should match the address on your web site. If possible, put the address on each page of your site, in this format: Address, City, State (ST) Zip.

PHONE NUMBERS: Make sure the number you give is the one you want to receive business calls on. Don't put your cell phone in unless you are prepared to talk about your business on that phone.

DESCRIPTION: Try to include a key phrase or two in your description (200 characters max). However it is most important that it is clear and easy to read for the user. Do not keyword stuff!

CATEGORIES: Your business can be in up to 5 categories. We encourage you to use categories that are already established in the LBC, it will give you suggestions as you begin to type in a category. If you have a restaurant and a bed and breakfast, you will want to use two categories; the same goes for wedding venues or on-site catering. If you have a different web site, phone number or address for a part of your business (such as a B&B and a restaurant open to the public) you may consider creating a separate, unique listing for your secondary business.

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GOOGLE ALSO LOOKS HERE

We are finding more and more locations all the time where Google will turn to find local business information.

Listed below are other sites to get your business listed. Always make sure that the information you submit is exactly like your Google Local Business listing.

- acxiom.com
- infousa.com
- insiderpages.com
- localeze.com
- merchantcircle.com
- superpages.com
- universalbusinesslisting.org
- yellowbot.com
- yelp.com

HOURS OF OPERATION: For bed and breakfasts, this is not nearly as important, in fact, it may be more helpful to choose to not display business hours.

PAYMENT OPTIONS: Include if you take travelers checks, cash and what credit cards. The more information you can provide here the better it is for the customer and you. They will call to book, not to see if you will take their Discover card.

PHOTOS: Choose a variety of photos that display different aspects of your business, including food and room photos. The first photo uploaded will be the first photo displayed. Make sure photos do not include illegal content, copyright or trademark infringements, adult content, promotion of hate or violence or invasion of privacy.

VIDEOS: If you have video on YouTube, or if past guests have posted video about you, you will want to include it in your listing. Video is a great way to share the experience at your destination.

ADDITIONAL BUSINESS DETAILS: Are some of your rooms pet friendly? Do you have wine and cheese receptions on the weekend? Do you take BedandBreakfast.com gift certificates? If there are other interesting and relevant aspects of your business to share, you can do so here. This is another place to rank for related search terms.

VALIDATE THE LISTING

Once you have finished updating the contents of your listing in the LBC, these changes will be made once Google can confirm the changes were made by the business owner or someone associated with the business via phone or postcard. The validation works as such:

- a) **BY PHONE:** Google will call the phone number associated with the business and an automated device will give a 5-digit PIN to be entered into the LBC. Note: If you change the phone number, Google may force you to validate by postcard.
- b) **BY POSTCARD:** A postcard containing the 5-digit PIN will arrive at the business address within two weeks of updating. It will include instructions on where to enter the PIN. Note: You may be forced to validate by phone if you change the business address.

REVIEWS

Customer reviews is an important part of ranking well on Google Maps. At this point, we do not know one site that is more important than the others to have reviews on, but we do know that the more reviews you have and the longer they are, the better it is for your placement. We also know the power that reviews have on future clientele. Which of these listings are the most compelling?

- A** [Arsenic and Old Lace Bed & Breakfast Inn](#) ★★★★★ [206 reviews](#) - [Write a review](#)
 60 Hillside Ave, Eureka Springs, AR - (479) 253-5454
"Overall very elegant B&B. We stayed in the Library Room. Very clean with nice additional amenities. Room was decorated very well. Loved the corner ..."
[Website](#) - [Directions](#)
- B** [Cliff Cottage Bed & Breakfast Inn](#) ★★★★★ [198 reviews](#) - [Write a review](#)
 42 Armstrong St, Eureka Springs, AR - (479) 253-7409
"This is the absolutely most perfect place we have ever stayed - it has everything! A spacious room, beautiful jacuzzi, gorgeous fireplace, ..."
[Website](#) - [Directions](#)
- C** [Bridgeford House](#) ★★★★★ [50 reviews](#) - [Write a review](#)
 263 Spring St, Eureka Springs, AR - (888) 567-2422
Category: Bed & Breakfast
"The Bridgeford House is located just far enough off of the beaten path to be quiet, serene, and relaxing but close enough to walk to all of the ..."
[Website](#) - [Directions](#)
- D** [Evening Shade Inn Bed and Breakfast](#) ★★★★★ [179 reviews](#) - [Write a review](#) - [1 coupon](#)
 3079 East Van Buren, Eureka Springs, AR - (479) 253-6264
"It was me and my wife on our honeymoon. Clark was very friendly and helpful with everything. He also makes an amazing **breakfast** every morning. ..."
[Website](#) - [Directions](#)

It would be nice if every guest took the time to write a beautiful review for you after they came to stay, unprompted. But they just probably won't. So, you need to encourage them to share with the world the amazing experience they had with you. Use your quarterly email newsletter to include a link to your page on Trip Advisor or bedandbreakfast.com. Or, if you use CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software, you may be able to send a "thank you" email a few days after their stay. This is a great time to ask them to leave a review for you.

The most common sites that Google Maps gets reviews from are listed below, but there are other locations.

- TripAdvisor.com
- BedandBreakfast.com
- Yelp.com
- InsiderPages.com
- CitySearch.com
- Zagat.com
- Frommers.com


COUPONS

Once you have claimed your business in the LBC, you can make coupons within the LBC. The coupons appear alongside your business listing in Google Maps. It is a simple process that can increase the potential of attracting new clientele. Similar to making an ad in Google Adwords, you can have 35 characters for your business name, a headline with 25 characters, sub-heading with 35 characters and details up to 250 characters. You can also add an image, and an expiration date.

Preview:

This is how your coupon will look to Google users:

Summary View


 [Free Afternoon Tea](#)
Stay two nights and have tea free!

Detail View

PRINTABLE COUPON	Good until 11/30/2009
------------------	-----------------------

My Bed and Breakfast
Free Afternoon Tea
Stay two nights and have tea free!

Not valid during holidays.

 [auto-generated]

A user can print this, or you can include an offer code that someone can use to redeem the online offer.

CONSISTENT DATA AND CITATIONS

To help ensure your business has high visibility in Google Maps, as well as throughout the web, make sure contact information to submitted directories, especially local search engines, is the same across the board.

Some of these include, but are not limited to:

LOCAL SEARCH ENGINES

- TrueLocal.com
- Local.com
- CitySearch.com (paid only)

YELLOW PAGES

- YellowPages.com
- DexKnows.com (paid only)
- SuperPages.com

LOCAL SOCIAL BUSINESS NETWORK SITES

- Yelp.com
- InsiderPages.com

LOCAL BACKLINKS

If there is a web site that is directly about your local area, such as a Chamber of Commerce site or a local lodging association, having links from these relevant local sites can help your Google Maps placement.

Some of the best local links include:

Chamber of Commerce

- Convention and Visitor Information Bureau
- Local and/or Regional Tourism Bureaus
- Blogs about the Area

The more references to your web site or physical address the better. A listing of just your address has a lot of weight with Google Local Business Center Listings.

REPORTING CAPABILITIES

Starting in May 2009, Google added reporting capabilities to local business listings. These have expanded over time and are now quite extensive.

IMPRESSIONS & ACTIONS

The primary reporting metrics show impressions (how many times your listing has appeared in a Maps search result) and actions. Actions are different ways people interact with your listing. They include:

- Clicks for more information on Maps
- Clicks for driving directions
- Clicks to your web site

Similar to Google Analytics, you can change the date range to collect the data for a specific time period.

TOP SEARCH QUERIES

The top Google search queries are the phrases or keywords that users entered for which your business listing appeared. It also includes the frequency with which your listing appeared for these terms.

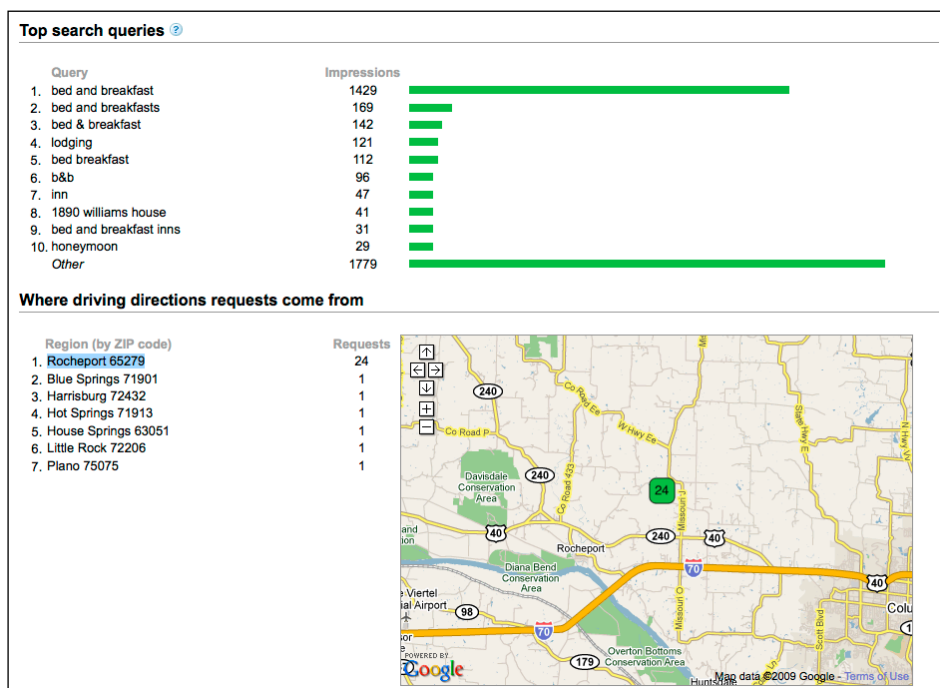
At this point there is a large number of "other" queries that are not identified. Being able to look through the top 20 or 30 requests versus just the top 10 would be an improvement.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS REQUESTS

One of the most interesting reporting features, driving directions requests show the top zip codes that request driving directions from a business listing in Google Maps. This can be a great tool for you to gauge where your clientele is willing to drive from; and can be an assist when trying to create a geographically targeted advertising campaign.

The LBC for your listing will also have a sidebar on the right hand side of the screen that shows how complete your listing is and if there are other aspects of the listing to be added.

If you have more than one business listing claimed in your LCB, than you can see all of those listings when you first log in.



GUIDELINES FROM GOOGLE

In November 2009, Google came out with an update to their Local Business Center Guidelines to help users and business owners have the most relevant search results as possible. Here is a comprehensive list of guidelines to follow when creating a business listing in the Local Business Center:

Ownership

- Only business owners or authorized representatives may claim their business listings on Google Maps.

Business Name

- The business name on Google Maps must be your full legal business name.
- Do not attempt to manipulate search results by adding extraneous keywords or a description of your business into the business name.
- Do not include phone numbers or URLs in the business name.

Physical Location

- Do not create listings at locations where the business does not physically exist.
- PO Boxes do not count as physical locations.
- Do not create more than one listing for each business location, either in a single account or multiple accounts.
- Businesses that operate in a service area as opposed to a single location should not create a listing for every city they service. Service area businesses should create one listing for the central office of the business only.
- Businesses with special services, such as B&B that does weddings or group events, should not create multiple listings to cover all of their specialties.
- The precise address for the business must be provided in place of broad city names or cross-streets.

URL & Phone

- Provide a phone number that connects to your individual business location as directly as possible.
- Provide one URL that best identifies your individual business location.
- Do not provide phone numbers or URLs that redirect or 'refer' users to other landing pages or phone numbers other than those of the actual business.

CONCLUSION

Implementing the steps in this white paper are the best practices we have for ensuring your business listing will be correct, and therefore assisting in your placement on Google Maps. Of course there are no guarantees, but following these best practice guidelines is going to ensure that you have all factors working in your favor for success on Google Maps.

HELPFUL LINKS & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Google Local Business Center Introduction - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjeCmHwqVpU>

Local Business Center for Google Maps - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lviDz8fUMTE>

David Mihm, Google LBC Expert - <http://www.davidmihm.com/local-search-ranking-factors.shtml>

Site to check your listings on Google, Yahoo, Best of the Web & Bing - <http://www.getlisted.org>

LBC User Guide - <http://maps.google.com/support/bin/static.py?page=guide.cs&guide=21029>

LBC Dashboard - <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2009/06/local-business-center-dashboard-opens.html>

LBC FAQ - <http://maps.google.com/support/bin/topic.py?topic=13416>

If you believe that another business is abusing Google's quality guidelines, we encourage you to report the listing. Your reports help to improve the overall Google Maps experience for everyone.

Reporting Location: http://maps.google.com/support/bin/request.py?contact_type=maps_spam

If you find that your listing was removed from Google Maps or you're unable to access your Local Business Center account, please file a reconsideration request. Google says all requests are reviewed, and the decision of Google in this regard shall be final and binding.

Reporting Location: http://maps.google.com/support/bin/request.py?contact_type=reinclusion