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# SEARCH MARKETING

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## Google Place Search makes local SEM critical to results

In a significant change to its search results, Google recently revamped its algorithms to make local businesses and listings more prominent and provide more relevant results for localized search queries. Google's Place Search, which rolled out late last year, combines local and organic listings in order to cluster search results around specific locations. Now, users executing geo-targeted searches can more easily make comparisons and find the information they're seeking.

This is part of a stream of recent activity by several Web giants, including Groupon, Facebook, Yelp and Citysearch, aimed at capturing marketing revenue from businesses that want to reach local customers. Because staying abreast of those trends is critical to a search marketer's job, Google algorithms are now factoring in customer reviews to display rankings, meaning a local business' competitors may rank higher if it

doesn't have any reviews.

If your company has multiple brick-and-mortar locations, these developments make it more critical than ever to implement a local search, online review and search engine optimization (SEO) strategy to achieve prominent visibility. Local search is growing in popularity as consumers shift from traditional phone book listings to finding products and services online. Currently 20% of all search queries are local, Google says, and that number is expected to grow.

In order to capitalize on Google's new displays, businesses should closely monitor their search rankings and fully optimize their Google Place Page profile. Marketers must ensure that their businesses have a presence on the thousands of other second- and third-tier search engines such as Yellowpages.com and Superpages.com, as well as online directories on the Web.

Businesses can optimize their Google Place listing by includ-

ing relevant Places categories and using long and short tail keywords, while avoiding duplication of keywords. They can also create customized fields and informative business descriptions that use relevant keywords and encourage online customer reviews. In addition, businesses should integrate brand-approved photos and videos, experiment with Google Tags and respond to Google customer reviews through Google Places.

As a result of Google Place Search, some companies have experienced a decrease in their search engine rankings. However, with the right local search strategy in place, the changes may make it possible for businesses with multiple locations to greatly improve their rankings for local search phrases.

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