



SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

A GUIDE TO IMPROVING YOUR WEBSITE'S
LOCAL SEARCH RESULTS

For further information, contact:

Edwin Hayward
Fax: +44-207-6813976
Email: ehayward@memorabledomains.co.uk

Web: www.memorabledomains.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

Search engines such as Google are placing more and more emphasis on the location of a business in determining the results they return for a given search query. Indeed, Google has started to return local business results for searches that don't even have a "location" specified, for example if you search for "plumber" on Google.co.uk then Google will integrate a list of plumbers close to your location into the wider search results.

Google relies heavily on being able to interpret the **content of a business website** in order to determine the location of the business behind it. As such, it's very important to optimise your website's content to make it more readily "findable" - the changes you make should also improve the visitor experience for people coming to your site.

TIPS TO OPTIMISE YOUR WEBSITE FOR LOCAL SEARCHES

- Incorporate your general location and type of business in the <TITLE> tag on your homepage. "ACME Solutions - Chartered Accountants - XYZ Town, County"
- Make sure you have your business name and address (in text, not graphics) prominently on the front page of the site. Format and punctuate the address in the usual way, i.e. use capitals at the beginning of words, separate each part of the address using commas, etc.
- Set up a "Contact Us" page, and add a link to this page from the footer of all other pages. The Contact Us page should include the following details, where relevant: the location of your business, telephone and fax numbers, directions to get there, business hours, holidays, 24 hour emergency contact number. This is where you would display an email address or contact form. It's also a good place to include a map to show people how to get to your premises. Keep everything in one place - don't make people visit one page to find out where you are, another to find out when you're open and yet another to find out how to call you!
- If you have a freephone or local call rate phone number, consider also displaying the equivalent local number next to it, to reinforce that you are genuinely a business that's "local" to the area.
- Use the "augmented" form of your address. For example, London addresses are not required to include the borough/town/area (e.g. Holborn, Putney etc.) but these are excellent additional keywords to have in your address.
- Also include abbreviations and local terms that refer to the place your business is located in the "How to Find Us/Directions" section of the page. For example, the local area may commonly be known as a different name from the "official" name in the address. Again, this serves to emphasise that your business is local.
- If you service a particular area, that's also information worth highlighting. "We deliver to XYZ town and the surrounding villages of ABC, DEF, GHI and JKL."

Since many people rely on Google Maps and other mapping sites to find businesses, it's worth checking your address to make sure that the main mapping services will show it in the correct location. To do so, enter your full address in the search box of each map site. If the point on the map is not where you expected it to be, try playing around with the format of the address a little (e.g. use "Street" not "Str", "Avenue" not "Ave") to see if you can improve the position and get it to reflect the real-world location of your business accurately.

GETTING LISTED IN ONLINE UK-WIDE BUSINESS DIRECTORIES AND LOCAL SEARCH SITES

There are over twenty major business directories and local search websites covering the UK market which offer free business listings.

Most are designed for listing physical businesses, i.e. businesses that operate out of a fixed address/location, though some also cater for companies that tend to travel to provide their services, such as locksmiths and plumbers.

By submitting your business information to each of these directories, you're maximising the chance that people will be able to find you, no matter where they end up searching on the Web.

BENEFITS OF GETTING BUSINESS LISTINGS

- Together, these business directories cover just about every major source of UK-wide local information. If you're listed on all of them, then you're likely to be much more "visible" than most of your competitors, as not many companies are diligent enough to visit every last directory website.
- Many of these directory sites are so big and so popular that they tend to show up higher than individual businesses in the search results, so it's important to make sure your business is listed on them.
- Basic listings are free, so there's no cost to you beyond your time and effort in preparing the information you'll need for the listings, then submitting to each web directory and following up if need be.
- A consistent listing for your company across many different business directories may also help your search promotion efforts on Google and Yahoo, since both search engines take into consideration "citations" i.e. mentions of a business by trusted sources.

DOWNSIDES OF GETTING BUSINESS LISTINGS

- Everyone has to eat... you're very likely to get cold calls, emails or letters trying to sell you enhanced business listings, advertising and other services from sales reps working for the various business directories. Just say "NO" as often as necessary (unless of course you actually want to advertise) and don't give in to pressure sales tactics. If they don't take a hint, emphasise that you don't have any money to spend on marketing. You can also register your business phone number with the free Telephone Preference Service (TPS) which should cut down on telemarketing calls. See <http://www.tpsonline.org.uk/tps/> for details.
- If you move in the future, or if significant information about your business changes (such as main telephone number) there are going to be a LOT of places you'll need to go to "fix" the information they have on record for you.

BUSINESS INFORMATION TEMPLATE

Different websites require subtly different information, so it's best to prepare and revise everything you'll need beforehand so that you can then pick and choose the relevant details and add your information to each website in a matter of minutes, without having to worry about making mistakes.

Below is a "template" that covers the information that you are likely to be asked when filling out your business entry at one of the directory sites. There is a certain amount of inevitable duplication, since, as explained above, each one requires similar but not identical information to the others.

You can either prepare this information on a piece of paper, or in a text file (easy to cut and paste).

IMPORTANT TIP: Always check your spelling, and if possible get somebody else to read over the information you've prepared before you use it. After all, these business listings may be the first time your potential customers come across your company, so it's important to make the best impression you can. In many cases, it's easier to get a listing initially than it is to get changes made to it subsequently, so again it's important to be as careful and accurate as you can.

1) INFORMATION FOR A NEW USER/ACCOUNT

Typically, you will need to register with business directories before you can add your information to them. This section relates to preparing the information for the user account, i.e. the person who's submitting the business listing, rather than the business itself.

- Title (Mr, Ms, Dr etc.)
- Your name (First Last)
- Your job title/position
- Username (you'll use this to log into the directory site again in future)
- Password (it's a good idea to pick something that's easy for you to remember, but hard for a stranger to guess. Make sure you use both letters and numbers for a more secure password)
- Your direct email address
- Your direct telephone number
- Your mobile telephone number
- Your fax number
- Your Skype account username

2) BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR COMPANY/BUSINESS

- Your company/Business name
- Company address
 - Building number
 - Building name
 - Address 1
 - Address 2
 - Locality/district (it's worth putting in the specific area of London or another major city, e.g. Putney or Knightsbridge, even if this isn't strictly necessary for post to get to you, since it's all good keywords)
 - Town/City
 - County
 - Full Postcode
- Main business telephone number
- Alternate business telephone number
- Mobile telephone number (if one is used for the business)
- Business fax number (if you don't have one, consider signing up with an internet-based fax service such as eFax.co.uk - it's a relatively cheap service, easy to use, and you don't even need a fax machine)
- Business email address (looks more professional if this is set up under the same domain name as your website, rather than using a free email address or one that your Internet provider gave you)
- Web address/URL

3) ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR COMPANY

- Year your business was founded
- Type of premises (head office, shop, factory etc.)
- Number of years your business has been at its current address
- Information about other branches
- Number of employees
- Name of holding company (if any)
- Company registration number
- VAT number
- Opening hours/times (be as specific as possible; don't forget to list which days you're closed)
- Memberships of any official trade bodies or associations
- Does your business offer free parking ? Y/N
- Does your business sell things via the web? Y/N
- Is your business open 24 hours a day? Y/N
- Does your business offer a delivery service ? Y/N
- What payment methods does your business accept? (e.g. cheque, Paypal, Visa credit cards, Mastercard credit cards, Visa debit cards, bank transfers, etc.)
- What radius does your business cover, if relevant? (e.g. 1 mile radius, 5 mile radius etc.)
- Citations (make a list of links to web sites that could help "authenticate" a listing, e.g. a link to your website, links to other business listings for your business, a link to the company report at Companies House etc.)

4) DESCRIPTION OF YOUR BUSINESS

- Business category (think of the keywords that most accurately describe your MAIN business offering - most directories only allow one listing per business, so if your business offers a number of services, pick the most relevant)
- Keywords related to your business/key areas of business (alternative ways to describe your main products or services, e.g. florist, flower shop, bouquets etc.) You could also list other nearby towns or villages that you service here.
- "Tagline" (short description of your business) in 75 characters or less. Don't repeat the name of your business here. Make sure it reads like a proper English paragraph, not just a long list of keywords - this is meant to appeal to HUMANS not to search engines. Keep it friendly, helpful and factual - but steer clear of hype as many directories will automatically reject entries with claims that are overly boastful or flamboyant.
- Description of your business in 200 characters or less. Similar to the "tagline" (same advice applies too) but you have a bit more room to expand on what you do/offer.
- Short message from the owner: a personal message from the business owner or representative. Similar to the description, but can be more direct i.e. a chance for you to "talk" to your potential customers.
- Brief history of your business: a very short history of your business, with major milestones or events of particular interest to potential customers. Keep it brief, this isn't meant to be "War and Peace"!

5) PHOTOS AND MULTIMEDIA

Certain business directories allow business owners to upload photos to enhance their listings.

You should therefore prepare some up-to-date photos (preferably high resolution and of good quality - you can always resize them or crop them later) of:

- the outside of your business
- your business signage (if it's distinctive in any way)
- the interior of your business
- major products, services etc.

Make sure that the photos are nice and bright (think sunny day, or a bit of careful photo enhancing) and try not to include anything "off-putting" in them (e.g. un-cleared tables, rubbish outside, parked cars that block the view, messy product displays etc.)

If you have access to a video camera, or a cooperative friend with one, consider shooting a few minutes of video too. Not many sites support video yet, but it's clearly a trend that's growing so that way you'll be ahead of the curve...

PLACES TO LIST YOUR BUSINESS

Below, you'll find the web addresses of all the major directories covering the UK market.

After you've finished preparing your information, you can visit each website in turn and submit the relevant details about your business.

IMPORTANT NOTE #1: After you've submitted your information to one of these websites, make a note of the date you submitted and any other specific details you might need to find the listing again, such as a reference number you were given. **Always write down the username and password you used to submit to a particular website, and keep them in a safe and secure place - you'll need them again if you have to change the entry in future.**

IMPORTANT NOTE #2: Not all of these directories are applicable for all types of business. For instance, some cater to companies operating in the tourism industry, others only provide listings to B2B companies. Make sure you read the instructions carefully at each site before you submit your listing.

IMPORTANT NOTE #3: Your business may well already be listed with some of these websites, even if you've never submitted the information (they build their listings from company records and other public sources of information). Always check to see if you're listed before submitting a new entry, and "claim" or "amend" the existing information as necessary if it's incomplete or incorrect.

IMPORTANT NOTE #4: Some of these websites offer you the chance to pay for an enhanced listing. This will obviously depend on the state of your company's finances and the value you perceive in that particular directory, but one thing that may be worth paying for is the chance to add a link to your website from your business listing. After all, without that, all that visitors have to go on is the name of your business (and sometimes a brief description) and your contact information.

Yahoo! Local

Main site: <http://uk.local.yahoo.com/>

Submit at: <http://yahoo.infoservegroup.com/businessdetails.html>

Google Local (covers Google Maps and Google.co.uk)

Main sites: <http://www.google.co.uk/> and <http://maps.google.co.uk/>

Submit at: <http://www.google.com/local/add/splashPage?gl=GB&hl=en-GB>

Yell (Yellow Pages online)

Main site: <http://www.yell.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.yelldirect.com/freelisting/home.html>

We Love Local

Main site: <http://www.welovelocal.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.welovelocal.com/businesses/>

Thomson Local

Main site: <http://www.thomsonlocal.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.thomsonlocal.com/free-listing.aspx>

City Visitor

Main site: <http://www.city-visitor.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.city-visitor.com/products/index.html#listing>

UFindUs

Main site:

Submit at: http://www.ufindus.co.uk/get_on_ufindus.php

InfoServe

Main site: <http://www.infoserve.com/>

Submit at: http://search.infoserve.com/are_you_listed.asp

TouchLocal

Main site: <http://www.touchlocal.com/>

Submit at: <https://www.touchtarget.com/product/home>

BizWiki (also covers AccessPlace and TownPages)

Main sites: <http://www.bizwiki.co.uk/> and <http://www.accessplace.com/> and <http://www.townpages.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.bizwiki.co.uk/write.htm>

bView (listings here also show up on Ask.co.uk for relevant searches)

Main site: <http://www.bview.co.uk/>

Submit at: <http://www.bview.co.uk/app/frontend/AddListing>

Scoot (also covers AskAlix.co.uk)

Main site: <http://www.scoot.co.uk/>

Submit at: <http://www.scoot.co.uk/advertise/free-listing.html>

BT/The Phone Book

Main site: <http://www.thephonebook.bt.com/publisha.content/en/index.publisha>

Submit at:

<http://www.thephonebook.bt.com/publisha.content/en/overview/contact/listform.publisha>

FreeIndex.co.uk

Main site: <http://www.freeindex.co.uk/>

Submit at: <http://www.freeindex.co.uk/signup.htm>

Local Data Company

Main site: not a public facing local directory, but a data provider that is used by a large number of local sites.

Submit at: <http://www.localdatacompany.com/search>

Yelp UK

Main site: <http://www.yelp.co.uk/>

Submit at: <http://www.yelp.co.uk/business>

MultiMap

Main site: <http://www.multimap.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.multimap.com/help/#aq727>

KellySearch

Main site: <http://www.kellysearch.co.uk/>

Submit at: <https://my.kellysearch.com/>

UpMyStreet

Main site: <http://www.upmystreet.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.upmystreet.com/findmynearest/premium-listing/free-business.html>

AppleGate

Main site: <http://www.applegate.co.uk/>

Submit at: http://www.applegate.co.uk/form_chg.htm

118.com

Main site: <http://www.118.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.118.com/AddBusiness.aspx>

Tipped

Main site: <http://www.tipped.co.uk/cities>

Submit at: <http://www.tipped.co.uk/login>

TrustedPlaces

Main site: <http://trustedplaces.com/>

Submit at: <http://trustedplaces.com/merchant/marketing>

LocallyCompared

Main site: <http://www.locallycompared.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.locallycompared.com/registerbusiness-search>

Qype

Main site: <http://www.qype.co.uk/uk>

Submit at: http://www.qype.co.uk/business_users/search_and_claim_place_pitch

Tupalo

Main site: <http://tupalo.com/en/united-kingdom>

Submit at: First choose a town or city from the main site, then click "Add a Spot" from the navigation menu at the foot of the page.

BrownBook

Main site: <http://www.brownbook.net/>

Submit at: <http://www.brownbook.net/add.html>

SmileLocal

Main site: <http://www.smilelocal.com/>

Submit at: http://www.smilelocal.com/get_listed.php

Now2Business

Main site: <http://www.andys-now2business.co.uk/>

Submit at: http://www.andys-now2business.co.uk/n2b/get_listed.cfm (a one-time fee of 10 pounds applies)

Kompass UK

Main site: <http://www.kompass.co.uk/>

Submit at: http://www.kompass.co.uk/frameset.asp?_URL=addmycompany

BT Tradespace

Main site: <http://www.bttradespace.com/>

Submit at: http://www.bttradespace.com/signup-free/Register.aspx?s_intcid=ts_intban_homepageheader_businessRET_getatradespace

EuroPages

Main site: <http://www.europages.co.uk/>

Submit at: <http://www.europages.co.uk/myEuropages-web/myEuropages/>

BusinessMagnet

Main site: <http://www.businessmagnet.co.uk/>

Submit at: <http://www.businessmagnet.co.uk/complimentarylistings.htm>

GBGuide

Main site: <http://www.gbguide.com/>

Submit at: <http://www.gbguide.com/cgi-bin/search/addurl.cgi>

B2BIndex

Main site: <http://www.b2bindex.co.uk/>

Submit at: <http://www.b2bindex.co.uk/index/Listings/action/AddSite/>

Business Directory UK

Main site: <http://www.business-directory-uk.co.uk/>

Submit at: <http://www.business-directory-uk.co.uk/business-links.php>

The Local Web

Main site: <http://www.thelocalweb.net/>

Submit at: <http://www.thelocalweb.net/Upload1.asp>

POST-LISTING FOLLOW UP PROCESS

Once you've listed your business, some of these directories will follow up in various ways to authenticate the basic details you've provided. They may phone you, email you a particular code that you'll have to input into a form, or even send you a letter with additional instructions. In most cases, they won't approve your listing (or your "claim" over an existing listing) until you've completed the additional verification steps.

One thing that will simplify the verification process is to ensure that all the relevant information is also on your own website, and up to date. For example, if somebody comes to your site to check the details you submitted, can they easily find your address, contact information, opening hours, holidays etc.?

Many of the directory sites above have the facility for visitors to post their own reviews and ratings of listed businesses. Once your company has been listed, make it a habit to look back at your listing from time to time to see what other people are saying about your business - and if you have satisfied customers that you have been working with for a long time, you may want to gently prompt them to add their own reviews.

OTHER PLACES TO LIST YOUR BUSINESS

As well as the large UK-wide directories we've already covered above, there are many other places you can try and get a business listing on the web. Since these are specific to each town or area, you're going to have to do a bit of research using Google in order to find them, but we'll try and give you as much information as possible to get started.

Depending on what industry you're in, it may be possible to get a listing - or at least a link - from the website of your **local council**, **town council**, **parish council** or other **local and regional government** websites. If you're in a tourism-related industry, look for the website of the **tourist information office** covering your area - they may have a directory or links section. Check to see whether you have a **chamber of commerce or industry**, or **local trade organisation**. You may qualify for a link from their websites.

Most towns and cities of any size (and even many villages) have **local area guides**, both larger efforts run as businesses and smaller hobby/information sites. Many places may have dozens of competing sites, each of which might be a good place to get a listing. The best way to find these (takes a few minutes, but the effort's worth it) is to go to <http://www.google.co.uk/> and then search for the name of your local town or city, and *look closely at each of the results*. There's going to be a lot of irrelevant stuff, but any local area guide worth the effort is bound to show up within the results for a search on the town's name, after all! Repeat this search using the name of the region or county that your business is situated in, as that will turn up other area guides with a wider focus.

Look at the **local newspapers** that cover your area. Many will have websites which include a "directory" section catering to local businesses. Some are free, others tend to charge a token annual or one-off fee.

Gumtree (the huge **classifieds** site) has nearly 50 local editions; each of these offers an opportunity for many types of business to place a classified ad promoting their products or services. There's a full list of all the areas covered by Gumtree here: http://www.gumtree.com/other_gumtrees.html

Another classified ads site worth a look is <http://www.classifieds.co.uk/> which lets you add your free business classified listing in hundreds of categories, as does CraigsList at <http://geo.craigslist.org/iso/gb>

So far, we've focused on area-related websites, but there's also the possibility of getting links from **industry-specific vertical sites**. If you're a carpenter, look for directories of carpenters. If you're an estate agent, track down directories of estate agents. Most industries of any size have at least one site dedicated to them.

The best way to find these vertical sites is to head over to <http://www.google.co.uk/> and choose the "pages from the UK" option and then do a search for your own vertical (e.g. "accountants") and look closely at all 1,000 results that are returned. Most will be for individual businesses, but mixed in there you should find plenty of references to any vertical directories that happen to cover your industry.

GUERRILLA TACTIC: SET UP YOUR OWN LOCAL AREA GUIDE

If you have some spare time on your hands, and if your area isn't particularly well covered by existing local area guide sites, consider making your own guide to the local area. You can put information on it about the local history, business listings, useful addresses and information (local government offices, hospitals, doctors, emergency pharmacies, etc.) Basically, try to make it stand on its own feet as a quality source of local information. Make sure you add photos of local landmarks and places of interest.

Here's where the "guerilla" part comes in: while keeping the content of the site itself unbiased, you can take advantage of advertising space on it by becoming the exclusive "sponsor" in the relevant sections of the website. If it starts to become popular in its own right, your local area guide can be a strong source of new business, since you have total control over the advertising space on it. And who knows, with enough traffic, you might even be able to generate additional income by selling advertising to non-competing local businesses...

GUERRILLA TACTIC: MAKE A CUSTOM GOOGLE MY MAP

When you sign into a Google account, and then switch to the map tool, you're given the option of saving searches to "My Maps". To do so, first search for the location you'd like to make a map for, which should display the corresponding "pin" on the map. When you click on the pin, you'll see a link called "Save to My Maps". This option allows you to start adding points to a custom map that you control.

If it's the first time you've used this function, you'll need to create a new My Map (give it a descriptive name that will help identify what it covers, e.g. "ACME Ltd Branches in Suffolk", and opt to make it "public") and then add the point to the map. You can give it a description, add links and photos, basically customise the entry in many ways. It's a good idea to include your address and other contact information within the entry.

A custom My Map is a great way to display all your company's branches, for example, or at the very least to highlight your location (it's possible to have a My Map with just a single pin on it). You can embed a My Map into your existing website with a few lines of code that Google provides.

Sometimes, Google will display relevant My Map content in the left hand column for general map searches, so this is another way that you can let web users know about your business.

GUERRILLA TACTIC: UPLOAD PHOTOS TO PANORAMIO.COM

Google makes use of photos hosted by Panoramio.com in some map searches (they'll typically show up in the left-hand column). So if your business is housed in a distinctive building, or the products or services make for interesting photographs, then try uploading a few photos to Panoramio.com and tagging them with your business name and address as well as a description of the photo itself.

GUERRILLA TACTIC: UPLOAD VIDEOS TO YOUTUBE.COM

Videos hosted on YouTube.com will reach one of the widest audiences in the world, as the website has hundreds of millions of users visiting it every month. At the same time, videos that Google can identify as specific to a particular location may also show up in the left-hand column of Google Maps for certain location searches. So you get two chances to attract more traffic.

Think about ways you might produce basic video content about your business. If you run a restaurant, for example, you could film the preparation of certain signature dishes. If your shop is located in a historic area, you could put together a micro walking tour of the interesting buildings and sights in the vicinity of the shop. Upload the videos to YouTube.com and tag them with the full name and address of your business, as well as keyphrases that describe the content of the video.

Of course, you can also reuse this video content on your own site by "embedding" it on a page using the code that Google supplies for that purpose.

About Memorable Domains

Memorable Domains sells high quality generic domain names. A generic domain name describes a product or service using the words people automatically associate with the topic: BeautySpa.co.uk, TaxPreparation.co.uk, LoftInsulation.co.uk, RecordingStudio.co.uk, HolidayApartment.co.uk, GeneralContractor.co.uk...

A generic domain name improves the effectiveness of all your efforts to drive web traffic, because:

- It stands out in search engine results (organic and paid)
- It's easy to remember
- It enhances the credibility and reputation of your business

Our domains cover topics such as computers and technology, shopping, accounting and finance, travel, business, property, furniture, toys and games, gardening, food and drink, insurance, health and beauty, kitchens and bathrooms, transport and more...

Please visit <http://www.MemorableDomains.co.uk/> for the full list.