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Local Search as a Lead Generator

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Gone are the days of running an ad in the yellow pages or local newspaper and crossing your fingers that the right eyes would pass over it. Your customers look to the instant gratification of online search, sometimes even through their mobile phones, when they're ready to make a purchase. Implementing local search best practices will ensure that these qualified customers find you.

In a 2007 Nielsen and WebVisible, Inc. survey of people who had searched for a local service vendor in the last 90 days, 6% reported they would visit a vendor in-person, 11% would make contact through a website form, 16% would write to an email address and 68% use a phone number posted on a website to contact the vendor. Make your phone number and contact information highly visible on your website, and assign trackable URLs and phone numbers to each advertising referrer that you use. Keep track of what's working and what isn't in an analytics program. This allows you to keep your program measurable and to continually optimize for leads and conversions.

Here are the tactics (and measurement methods) that turn a local marketing effort into a lead generation machine:

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): The most basic step is utilizing your website and search engines' free listings to help customers find your business. Your physical address should appear in the website's header or footer in hCard format, and mention your location in the content, as 49% of searchers use geo-modifiers when performing a local search. Utilize your website as a source of geographical information beyond your simple address. Do you have multiple locations? Are you near a popular landmark? Is there parking nearby? Give your location in computer-friendly *and* human-friendly formats.

Submit your business to each of these major engine's business listings: [Google](#), [Yahoo](#), [MSN](#) and [Ask](#). Also list your business in these free local yellow pages and directories: [www.yellowpages.com](#), [www.superpages.com](#) and [www.dexonline.com](#). Be sure to track your website's SEO referrers with a free analytics program such as [Google Analytics](#).

Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Advertising: Run advertisements on search engines that geo-target to your business location, either by city or a certain radius around your address. Set up targeted advertisements per region, and utilize local lingo in keywords and ads, serving your searchers the most relevant ad possible. A Colorado "water fountain" is a "bubbler" in Wisconsin.

Cover your bases with general and specific terms. A property management company, for example, might consider this breakdown:

- Business name: ACME apartment community





- General terms: apartment
- General + regional terms: apartment Denver
- Specific services or long tail: 2 bedroom apartment rental under \$600, 3 bedrooms in downtown Denver

The same analytics program you use for SEO and a trackable phone number provide the metrics you need to continually optimize the program: cost per click, click through rate and conversion rate.

Classifieds & Reviews: Do you offer a product or service that fits into locally targeted classifieds, such as [Craig's List](#), or that customers can review on sites such as [Yelp](#) or [Judy's Book](#)? Not only do they help your customer find you online and create positive associations with your brand, but it will also assist your SEO efforts by building content-friendly links back to your website.

Social Tools: Consider building a profile for your business on [MySpace](#). This builds content-friendly links to your website and allows customers to participate in a conversation about your brand and offerings. [Facebook](#) allows businesses to create branded widgets that customers can post to their own pages. Take note as to whether these sites are showing up as referrers in your analytics program.

Affiliates & Local Linking: Post your business on industry-specific sites. If you're in the apartment business, think [Apartments.com](#) and [Rent.com](#). Also consider getting local links through your Chamber of Commerce, local blogs, local newspapers and niche targets in your area.

Mobile-Friendliness: Yahoo projects that there will be three times as many mobiles as PCs by 2010. Grab an iPhone to test how your site looks on mobile devices, or use a [validation tool from the W3C](#). If re-designing your website to be mobile-friendly isn't in the budget, consider designing a Web page for mobile users with a URL in one of these formats: [m.yoururl.com](#) or [yoururl.com/mobile](#). List your business in GOOG411, or Google Voice Local Search, a tool that allows users to make a business search in any U.S. city by calling a toll-free telephone number. Make sure your email and phone number are easily found for real-time conversion, and track any sales.

Click-to-Call/Pay Per Call: Check out Google's Click-to-Call solution or Ingenio's Pay Per Call for options where you pay for phone calls rather than clicks.

Creating a local search program is simple. The reward? Leads that have everything in your favor: the right location, an active interest in your offering and the information they need to find you fast.

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