



# LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING - ARE YOU IN OR OUT?

No matter what industry you are in, if you own a business, marketing online is essential to your success. With an average of 475,000 new businesses opening in the United States each month, it is more important now than ever to make sure your orthodontic practice stands out both online and offline. Many orthodontic teams still fail to see the relevance of investing in their online marketing, especially if they consider themselves a patient referral practice. This couldn't be further from the truth!

In today's digital marketplace, the first form of contact with any business is no longer the new patient phone call but the Internet. Consumers google your name and begin researching what pops up. Even if they hear your name from friends or family, the Internet is where they find your contact information and more.

Are you proactively delivering your marketing message exactly the way you want it delivered, or leaving it to chance?

## **Back to Basics - What is Local Search?**

The definition is simple. Local search is the process of using Internet search platforms (such as Google, Bing, or Yahoo Search) or mobile applications, based on your brand and top orthodontic keywords to target a specific geographical area. 72% of online users today state that local search results are the most relevant in their lives. In a nutshell, if your local business listing isn't set up and optimized correctly for relevant local keyword searches, competing orthodontic practices can potentially steal away your new patients.

## **How are Consumers Searching?**

Most people today, when searching for a product or service, begin by using their mobile phone. So much so that in 2018, 52.2% of all website traffic worldwide was generated through mobile phones. Since Google drives 97% of mobile traffic, it makes sense to keep up to date with your local business listing to remain competitive.

*by Mary Kay Miller*

While a prospective new patient is googling your name or searching with orthodontic keywords to help connect your brand with their search, Google also posts alternative practice options for your category below every Google My Business listing. Your word of mouth referral can easily be kidnapped depending upon what they find in your geo-targeted area.

The average orthodontic patient is not going to always know the correct orthodontic terms. In fact, 53% use generic search terms to find a business or service vs 35% who type in a specific business name. For this reason alone, you should always include product or service related keywords, a standardized street address and phone, and hours of operation for your business listing to improve your chances of being found in your category.

## **How Consumers View Local Search Results**

Once consumers type in their search terms and local results populate, how is the information assimilated by them? Studies show that 50% of users view organic results in a list format below the map in organic search, 13% view results in the map area, and 37% view results on both the organic list and the map. 70-80% of people ignore paid search results, choosing to only click on organic search results. The average click through rate across all industries for pay-per-click ads is 3.48% in 2018.

No matter what your business, consumers today are demanding complete, trusted, and dependable information about you online. It is your job to make sure this information is complete, up to date, and easy to analyze

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by the search engines in order to rank your practice in the local search mix.

## What Information are They Looking For?

In order to ensure that your business listing grabs attention and indexes with the search engines, provide information YOUR VISITORS want to know, in addition to the product and services YOU want to promote.

For visitors, it is essential to add to your Google and Bing Local Business listings, your address and phone number, category of your business (orthodontist - not dentist), website URL, hours of operation, photos of your logo, doctor(s), staff and office, and last but not least, CONSUMER REVIEWS. Including "expected" information in your business listing not only makes consumers happy, it is a key component to influence your overall ranking score in the maps area and organic list on Google and Bing search platforms.

## What Drives Consumers?

Statistics show that when people perform an online search, 33% are more likely to select the business that they are most familiar with, 28% choose based on the location or proximity, and the latest 2018 reviews surveys report that as much as 90% of online consumers state they rely on consumer reviews to make their buying decisions. Since consumers don't look past page one in local search, not only is it necessary to ensure a potential new patient finds your listing in your hometown among their top local search results, your reviews in your local business listing are a major deciding factor. Those practices still unwilling to jump on the reviews bandwagon will be left in the dust when it comes to promoting a practice to consumers online.

## Google Dominates the Review Market

According to Review Trackers' 2018 Reviews Survey: Statistics and Trends, Google dominates the review market. Six in ten consumers now look to Google for reviews. Yelp still dominates in California and in some major metro areas. However, practices on the west coast still need to gather Google reviews to meet the algorithm requirements for ranking in the maps area. Here is a summary of the reported consumer trends:

1. Google is the review site of choice. 63.6% of consumers say they are likely to check online reviews on Google before visiting a business — more than any other review site.
2. Consumers expect brands to respond to reviews—and are disappointed in the lack of response. 53% of customers expect businesses to respond to negative reviews within a

week. But 63% say that a business has never responded to their review.

3. Negative reviews drive away customers. 94% say an online review has convinced them to avoid a business.
4. Customers don't really trust businesses with lower than 4-star ratings. 80% of consumers say the star ratings they trust the most are 4.0, 4.5, and 5 stars.
5. Reviews are getting shorter. Reviewers are writing simpler and more to-the-point reviews. The average review is now 65% shorter since 2010, and is now roughly the size of a tweet.
6. Google and Facebook have become number one and number two for online reviews. Sites that focus primarily on reviews (like TripAdvisor and Yelp) are seeing less growth than Facebook and Google.
7. There are more and more positive reviews. Reviews are increasingly shifting from being a place where consumers air their grievances, to being a place to recommend businesses after a positive experience. This may be due in part to the increased availability of third-party review services to aid business in expediting the reviews process.

## Your Local Business Review List

Since the search engines rely upon software programs to supply your business information, it is important you review your local business information on a regular basis, at least every 60 days for accuracy. The search engines are computer based and driven by sophisticated software algorithms which can easily produce bugs after updates. Did you know that Google completely rebuilt the back end of the Google My Business area in 2018? Any problems with your listing? Many new features and services have been added to enhance promoting your business online.

Below is a list of items to review in your listing(s). Each location requires its own listing in local search.

## Maintain or Create a Local Business Listing

Google and Bing create local business listings whether you ask them to or not. It is up to you to approve and verify your information as accurate and provide additional marketing information to promote your practice. If you fail to manage your listing, the search engines will do it for you. Would you let just anyone answer your phone in the office? Since the Internet is the first form of contact with new patients, monitoring and maintaining your local business listings is critical to delivering

your marketing message the exact way you want it delivered.

### **What is the Difference Between a Managed and Unmanaged Local Business Listing?**

An unmanaged listing may be altered in order to fit the search engines specific objectives, formatting, and advertising goals they see fit at any given time. It is also important to note that unmanaged listings have lower confidence scores, may be altered by third parties, and carry weak signals to local search platforms resulting in lower ranking results.

A managed listing by the business owner provides control over the data that is presented to potential new patients. These listings have high confidence scores, are secured from distortion by third parties, and have strong verified signals. Listing owners also have the ability to make updates as necessary and include even more information about their business that could influence users searching for their services as more options are provided.

### **Indexing Your Brand Identity**

Once you verify your local business listing, it is then processed by the search engine for optimization, validation, duplication, locations assignment for Geo targeting, and confidence scoring along with 900 million bits of data. Your listing becomes your brand's identity and should match all other references to your practice online. Failing to do so will result in lower ranking score, especially in the maps area. Make sure your business name matches your corporate identity in your state. Google cross references state corporate records and can downgrade you score if it doesn't match.

### **Publishing Your Brand Identity**

Every listing that has been processed is published and made available to more than 100 search platforms, mobile applications, GPS and navigation systems, online directories and more.

These listings are called citations and also should be verified to preserve your trusted brand identity.

### **Transitioning or Purchasing a Practice?**

If the name, address, or phone number of your business changes, for whatever reason, it is critical to your brand identity to notify the Internet of the changes. Failing to do so will result in lack of trust in your business listing and significantly reduce your brand score in local search results. This includes your website, website artwork, written content, SEO, social media, local business listings, top local search aggregators, local search databases and more. Failing to do so will greatly impede your brand trust and your ability to market yourself effectively online.

It is no secret that effective online marketing places your website, reputation marketing, and brand identities in front of real consumers. In the ever changing Internet marketing arena, when was the last time you checked your listing(s) and reviews marketing in comparison to your competitors? How did you stack up? ☺

## **About the Author**



Mary Kay Miller is an Internet Marketing Consultant for the orthodontic profession specializing in, WordPress Website Design, SEO, Reputation Marketing, Local Search Strategies, and Exclusive Web 2.0 services.

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