

Title: Local Searches for Churches

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Summary: People long for meaningful connections and will pursue them in any way possible. Connection is at the core of all the social networks - Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn, eHarmony, Match.com, et al. Who do I know? And, just as importantly, who knows me?

People are communal beings - we need each other. We also look for meaning in our lives. As the world merges, local churches play a significant role - if they are prepared to do so.

Applications and search results are becoming very localized - providing content relevant to the searcher, depending on their place and time. All organizations need to create (searchable) content around their location and their website.

Has your church prepared itself to be a place of community for people searching for connection in their area? We'll give you an overview of the local search landscape and how to reach your online neighbor.

Who is My Neighbor?

When asked this question, Jesus told a story (Luke 10:26-37). Are we asking the right question? Who sees us and our churches as their neighbors?

As humans, we are constrained by both time and place. Who we are is made up of our history when we are and it speaks to why we are. The Internet blurs some of those boundaries and limitations, so we need to learn how to bridge our own limitations and get to know our neighbors.

How do you get to know your neighbor via the Internet?

Just a few generations ago, we relied more heavily on our neighbors than we do now. We knew every family on the block and most of them on the next blocks over. We knew our neighbors next door and the ones right across the street. Not because I didn't need to. The people I encounter every day come from different backgrounds.

We used to see each other at the market, or borrow sugar from each other. We came together. Today, local networking like that is done on a network of complex algorithms to tell us who's close by. Our survival is still greatly impacted by our daily actions.

Chances are, you may have some personal electronic connections already.

directories are now being circulated with email addresses, instead of just remember a time when you didn't need phone numbers - you just picked someone was there already? Or, when you really "dialed" a phone connected through local organizations, like your children's schools. You may encounter them through a mobile phone app for local places (Foursquare). As an organization, you may collect email addresses for sending out updates. There are lots of places you'll be able to make another connection with to know them a little bit better.

Most of all the apps (applications) that run on smartphones are location-based - other people nearby also using the same app.

How do your neighbors know about the Internet?

As an organization, you'll need some basic electronic outposts - a website, your hub for all online activity. But, where do you go from there?

Since search engines are where most people start when trying to answer questions, there, too. Before you can begin to develop relationships with your neighbors, you need to be introduced to them. To get an introduction to your neighbors through a search engine needs to get to know you. Sounds simple enough, doesn't it?

<https://www.google.com/search?q=local+business+near+me>

How important is local search and what factors does it have? David Mihm provides an [overview](#).

Search Engines

Have you noticed how search results on Google, Bing and Yahoo have a local bias? They dominate the first page of results? And that you can click on a link to see a map? Google, Bing and Yahoo all have directories of local organizations. If you already have a listing there, just waiting to be claimed by you. The search engines are good sources for creating these listings - phone directories, business filings, social media directories and individually submitted entries. They will do some cross-referencing. Information is deemed reliable.

Step 1 is to introduce yourself to the search engines and the big ones give you a hand.

On **Google**, [create a Google+ profile for your business or organization](#).
On **Bing**, you'll [create a Microsoft account](#) and can connect your Facebook account. Then create and claim your business listing.
On **Yahoo!**, you'll [create a Yahoo! account](#) and create and claim your business listing.

For all these accounts, you **use the same email address connected to your organization and its identity** - a personal address - something you can pass on to another person. I'll cover this in more detail at another time.

Telling the search engines about your organization is a big step, so go slow and ask questions. As part of each of these enrollments, there will be a verification process that search engines can verify you really do represent that business or organization and not just dishonestly. You will be provided a code through a phone call to the place or a letter sent to the mailing address for the business, which will then be used to verify your listing.

This is not a time to take a NAP!

This is the one time I will tell you to write for the search engines, not for humans. The ones that have the biggest impact on your visibility and identity online - and that are yours to own. They are **name, address, and phone number (NAP)**. All else, make sure these are consistent for every listing you do - not only in the way they are spelled but also in the format you use.

Name: You may be St. Luke's, Saint Luke's and St. Luke's. These are 3 different places to a search engine.

Address: Mail addressed to 101 N Main St, 101 North Main Street and 101 Main Street all mean the same to you, but it still casts a shadow of doubt to a search engine.

Phone Number: 515.555.1000, (515) 555-1000 and 515/555-1000 or 555-1000 all mean the same to people, but, again, these formats make matching phone numbers a little more difficult. If you have multiple phone numbers, make sure you use a primary phone number for all listings.

A few other things to be consistent with - city, state and postal (zip) code.

Local Business Directories

After you've introduced yourself to the search engines, you'll want to get your business listed in local directories. There are other sources of local citations (mentions and listings for your business) that can lend their credibility and authenticity to yours. Sites where you can claim your business are those that focus on local activities, like Foursquare and Yelp, business directories like CitySearch, and map services, like Mapquest and Nokia (Here.com). There are many other sources and they vary in importance, based on your city and business category.

Want to see how these are all connected? Check out this [local citation diagram](#) and see how local citations your organization may have been found in kinds of Moz.com.

I'm going to save you a lot of time by using [GetListed.com](#). You just enter your organization's name and zip code and push the button. After it does some searching, it will come up with a list of matches for your organization. Click on the one that is yours and see the various citation sites. GetListed will tell you what listings are missing, what information is missing or inconsistent. There will also be buttons to claim or update your listing.

If you want to do things the hard way, here are a few of the sites and links to them. You can create or claim your listing on each of these sites, and maintain it. Some have paid options available, too, of course.

Foursquare [create an account](#) using Facebook, Google or an email address, then , place
 Yelp [create an account](#) to locate and claim your place
 CitySearch [create an account](#) (you can use your Facebook account to join). CityGrid
 company for CitySearch
 Manta [create an account](#) to create or claim your place.

Specialized Directories

Many church denominations maintain websites and a directory of their local Christian organizations. Are you listed in your denomination's directory and up to date?

Catholic Parish <https://www.masstimes.org/>
 Lutheran Churches

ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) <http://www.elca.org/ELCA/...ation.aspx>
 LCMS (Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod) <http://www.lcms.org/search.asp>
 WELS (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod) <http://www.wels.net/locatorsearch.com/>

United Methodist Church <http://archives.umc.org/D...amp;mid=22>
 Southern Baptist Church <http://www.sbc.net/localchurches/>
 Episcopal Church <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/d-a-church>
 Presbyterian Church (USA) <http://www.pcusa.org/>
 Christian & Missionary Alliance Churches <http://www.cma.org/locate/>

Christian Broadcasting Network <http://www.cbn.com/spirit...rtool.aspx>

FaithStreet <http://www.faithstreet.com/>

Social Platforms

Getting listed in the right places can help your local search results. Apart from specialized directories, social platforms also lend their influence. Your brand name on each of these platforms and get your information listed and require a bit more of a commitment on your part to get the biggest advantage don't let that stop you.

Here are some of the more influential social platforms that impact local search

Facebook [create a personal profile](#) and check if a location has already been added or create your page. Otherwise, you can merge the pages later.
 LinkedIn [create a personal profile](#) and then you can create a company page for each
 YouTube - using a Google account for your organization (don't use

a channel.

Twitter [create an account](#) your organization.

Pinterest [create a business account](#)

Slideshare [create an account](#) can get a pro account to create branded channels (non-profits is 50% off). Slideshare is owned by LinkedIn.

Instagram - create an account (you'll have to install the app on your

iOS/Android) Facebook owns Instagram

Flickr [create an account](#) your organization. Flickr is owned by Yahoo!

Establishing your accounts on the social channels assists with creating a presence on the web. Having the same user identity on all these platforms helps people find your channels with your organization.

We'll cover each of these in more depth in separate articles.

Intermediaries - Local Data Services

There are services (fee for service, of course) that provide you with the listings, making it a single place to update. Theoretically, this is better. I've explored these and the experience is no less painful or more efficient. For using a local data service to manage your listings is probably not the best

Yext

Localeze

Infogroup

Acxiom

These businesses have expended a great deal of effort and money to establish local authorities for local data. Proceed with caution - you'll be putting your data in someone else's hands.

Summary

If you have a message to spread, the Internet is the place to go. Whether you are a business or an organization trying to reach people in your neighborhood, the Internet is the best place to go. Connecting locally in today's environment. To be known in the community

Claim your listings online. More importantly, make sure no one else claims your local listing service. Start with the big 3 search engines, move on to the social networks into making the most of your profile on social networks.

Strengthen the connections between your listings - many will enable you to connect between other sites, especially the social accounts. Some are owned by Facebook/Instagram, Yahoo!/Flickr, LinkedIn/Slideshare - and sharing your listings on these networks strengthens your identity. Establish the connections and leverage them by going to posting the same update to each of the sites, or letting one update carry the message

as tempting as it might be!

You might want to have a look at which of the citation sources are most relevant to your research to help prioritize your efforts.

In developing a strategy for your organization, we've talked about budget, variety, needs, or access. How do you translate these concepts to your work? Optimization is not a strategy - it is a tactic you can employ as part of your strategy. You need to identify some objectives for your local search efforts. Your strategy guides your actions, guiding your decisions on what tactics and tools to use.

Further reading:

<https://getlisted.org/static/resources/seeking-and-finding-on-the-internet/> #ChSocM chat

What questions do you have about local searches and how to manage them?