Title: Local Searches for Churches

Subtitle: Web Strategies

Second Subtitle: #0 Churches Near Me - Who Is My Neighbor?

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Summary: People long for meaningful connections and will pursue them i
is at the core of all the social networks - Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, I
eHarmony, Match.com, et al. Who do I know? And, just as importantly, wh

People are communal beings - we need each other. We also look for mea
2 things merge, local churches play a significant role - if they are prepa

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

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

Who is My Neighbor?

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

As humans, we are constrained by both time and place. Who we are is ma
when we are and it speaks to why we are. The Internet blurs some of tho
boundaries and limitations, so we need to learn how to bridge our own li
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 thar
knew every family on the block and most of them on the next blocks over
neighbors next door and the ones right across the street. Not because I
don't need to. The people I encounter every day come from different

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

Chances are, you may have some personal electronic connections already

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

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

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

As an organization, you'll need some basic electronic outposts - a w
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
there, too. Before you can begin to develop relationships with your neigh
introduced to them. To get an introduction to your neighbors through a s
engine needs to get to know you. Sounds simple enough, doesn't it?

https://www.google.com/se ... es+near+me

How important is local search and what factors does it have? David Mihm
overview

Search Engines

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

Step 1 is to introduce yourself to the search engines and the big ones gi

On **Google** - create a Google+ profile and a page for your business or organiza
On **Bing** - you'll need a Microsoft account and can connect your Facebook acco
create and claim your business listing
On **Yahoo!** you'll need a Yahoo! account to create and claim your business listing

For all these accounts, you'll want to ***use an email address connected to your orga***
and its identity - not a personal address - something you can pass on to anoth
cover this in more detail at another time.

Telling the search engines about your organization is a big step, so go s
questions. As part of each of these enrollments, there will be a verificat
engines can verify you really to represent that business or organization
dishonestly. You will be provided a code through a phone call to the plac
sent to the mailing address for the business, which will then be used to
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 fo
that have the biggest impact on your visibility and identity online - and t
own. They are your **name, address, phone number (NAP).** all else, make sure these
are consistant for every listing you do - not only in the way the are spell
format you use.

Name: You may be St. Luke's, Saint Luke's and St. Luke's
are 3 different places to a search engine
Address: Mail addressed to 101 N Main St, 101 North Main Street and 101
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
people, but, again, these formats make matching phone numbers a little
multiple phone numbers, make sure you use a primary phone number for

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

Local Business Directories

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

Want to see how these are all connected? Check out this local citation
local citations your organization may have made by Phil Rozek and Mike Ramsey of Moz.com

I'm going to save you a lot of work right off the bat. Go to whitespark.ca/getlisted and type in your organization's n
and zip code and push the button. After it does some searching, it will c
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, w
what information is missing or inconsistent. There will also be buttons to

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

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

Specialized Directories

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

Catholic Parishes - https://www.masstimes.org/
Lutheran Churches

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

United Methodist Churches - http://churcharchives.umc.org/D ... amp;mid=22
Southern Baptist Churches - http://www.sbc.net/localchurches/
Episcopal Churches - https://www.episcopalchurc ... d-a-church
Presbyterian Churches - http://www.pcusa.org/
Christian & Missionary Alliance Churches - https://www.cmalliance.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 directories and specialized directories, social platforms also lend their influence. You can claim your brand name on each of these platforms and get your information listed accurately. They require a bit more of a commitment on your part to get the biggest advantage, but don't let that stop you.

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

Facebook - create a personal account, then check if a location has already been added before you create your page. Otherwise, you can merge the pages later.
LinkedIn - create a personal account 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 for your organization.

Pinterest - create a business account

Slideshare - create an account. You can get a pro account to create branded channe
non-profits is 50% off). Slideshare is owned by LinkedIn.

Instagram - create an account (you'll have to install the app on you
iOS or Android). Facebook owns Instagram

Flickr - create an account for your organization. Flickr is owned by Yahoo!

Establishing your accounts on the social channels assists with creating a
the web. Having the same user identity on all these platforms helps peop
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.
explored these and the experience is no less painful or more efficient. F
using a local data service to manager your listings is probably not the be

Yext
Localeze
Infogroup
Acxiom

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

Summary

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

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

Strengthen the connections between your listings - many will enable you
between other sites, especially the social accounts. Some are owned by
Facebook/Instagram, Yahoo!/Flickr, LinkedIn/Slideshare - and sharing yo
networks strengthens your identity. Establish the connections and levera
go posting the same update to each of the sites, or letting one update ca

as tempting as it might be!

You might want to have a look at which of the citation sources are most i
category (churches) to help prioritize your efforts.

In developing a strategy for your organization, we've talked about b
variety, needs, or access. How do you translate these concepts to your w
optimization is not a strategy - it is a tactic you can employ as part of y
need to identify some objectives for your local search efforts. Your strat
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: Blog post from #ChSocM chat

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