

DigitalMarketing**NOW**

A Breakthrough Guide for Small Business

Flipping Google's

"Snack Pack" Update

to Your Advantage

**PARTNERS
IN PROFIT:**

HOW TO USE
HOST-BENEFICIARY
MARKETING
TO GROW YOUR
BUSINESS

**Snack
Pack**

65% LESS FAT

By Google

WHY YOU NEED A

Mailing List

FOR YOUR
LOCAL BUSINESS

How to Spy on
**Your Local
Competitors
Online**



DIGITAL SAPIEN INTERACTIVE
INTERNET MARKETING EVOLVED

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Welcome To

Digital Marketing NOW

Thanks for checking out Digital Marketing NOW, your online marketing resource guide for small business. Each month we will be covering topics that resonate with local businesses just like yours.

Our goal is simple. We want to enable you to do big things online, and it all starts by breaking down the complexities of marketing your business online.

It doesn't matter if you're just starting out, or an established business owner in your local community, you can always benefit from increasing your brand's visibility online.

To your Success,

Digital Marketing NOW
www.digitalsapien.com

Digital Sapien Interactive is the leading small business internet marketing service provider. We help small businesses connect with more customers online.

If you want to build your business, you need to market, it's that simple. But you can lose thousands of dollars if you don't know what you are doing. So we urge you to take action with some of the strategies we recommend.

For a more "hands off" approach, we offer affordable solutions and can deliver results. We hope you enjoy this issue of Digital Marketing NOW and feel free to reach out to us anytime.

Flipping the Google's “Snack Pack” Update to Your Advantage

As you may have already noticed Google has updated the way websites appear in local search engine results. While Google's updates vary from time to time, the latest update can affect websites in a number of different ways.

This “local snack pack” Google has created has changed a series of seven different local listing requirements to just three sets of changes. Local result listings will be shortened and the “Local Snack Pack” replaces the previously used “Carousel” by Google.

This shake up will determine how easily businesses can be found in browser searches across the world. This changes how web marketing will be completed so local websites appear higher in searches.



The goal is to ensure that a business website will fall in line with the new Google update and still maintain how easily consumers can locate the websites. There are methods and strategies to ensure that this new change will keep your website found.

Every business listing offers just a minimal amount of information that is targeted at searchers to go ahead and click through to the next interface and

then to a third interface.

Right now, this update only applies to a certain type of businesses such as restaurants and most service providers. However, this change could potentially affect other industries and businesses as well. That is why it is imperative to be aware of these changes now so as to not be blindsided by them later.

The Shift that Shook Up the Sites

While seven local businesses were previously listed, Google has shortened that to three of the top local listings. Included in these listings are the business name, location, brief description of the business, and the Google star rating based on customer experiences.

The image below shows the major change:

More in depth information will not be listed even though it can be vital information. While the listing might give the location of the particular business, it may not offer anything more than a city name.

To find the business address, it would require users to click through to find the information. While users might be looking for the business' website link or a phone number, Google will require a click through to another interface to find it.

The image compares two Google search results for 'Electrician in Boston'. The left side shows the 'Old 7 Pack' with seven listings, each with a brief description, website, and Google reviews. The right side shows the 'New 3 Pack' with three listings, each with a map snippet, business name, address, phone number, and Google reviews. The 'New 3 Pack' listings are more detailed and include a map snippet.

Old 7 Pack

- MacEwan Electric**
www.electrician-in-boston.net
2 Google reviews
- J.A. Electric Company**
www.bostonelectricalcontractor.net
1 Google review
- MJ Electrical Services**
www.bostonelectrician.org
1 Google review · Google+ page
- Boston Main Electrical**
www.bostonmainelectricalcorp.com
Google+ page
- Obin Electric Co.**
obinelectricco.com
1 Google review
- Elliott Electrical Services**
www.elliottelectricalservices.net
Google+ page
- MacEwan Electrician Boston**
www.electricianboston.8m.com
4.2 ★★★★★ 5 Google reviews

New 3 Pack

- Brian Carlson Electrical Contractor**
4.6 ★★★★★ 7 reviews · Electrician
Open until 5:00 pm
- Mike MacEwan Electrician**
No reviews · Electrician
- MacEwan Electric**
2 reviews · Electrician
Tremont St
Open until 5:00 pm

Not only does the snack pack version shake up online marketing and SEO, it also changes how it might affect visibility and traffic to the website. Someone who has never been to a city before might find themselves not interested in what the snack pack has to offer and the user may find themselves continuing to click even more to find just what they are looking for.

It not only seems like more work for the site content webmasters but also for the users who want to simply search for a nearby Italian restaurant.

What Looks Different...

The local search engine result pages (SERPs) will look different and the new local listings will also be different to navigate. In comparison, before the snack pack was utilized, if someone was looking for a local professional in heating and cooling, there would be a listing of seven different companies that offer those services.

It would include a location which usually provided an assigned location on a map of the city. It would also show if there were reviews or star ratings. It would also provide a telephone number and an easy click through straight to the company's website.

Now, with the **three pack abbreviated version**, users get three of those and it just lists the name of them. There is a link that shows that it is a heating and cooling service business but there is no phone number and no other information.

One might have star ratings provided by Google which has reviews but they are harder to get to. There are not necessarily direct links to the website either but instead, a little icon that can be clicked on to show there is a website. Now, searchers can no longer get business contact info but instead have to look it up on their own.

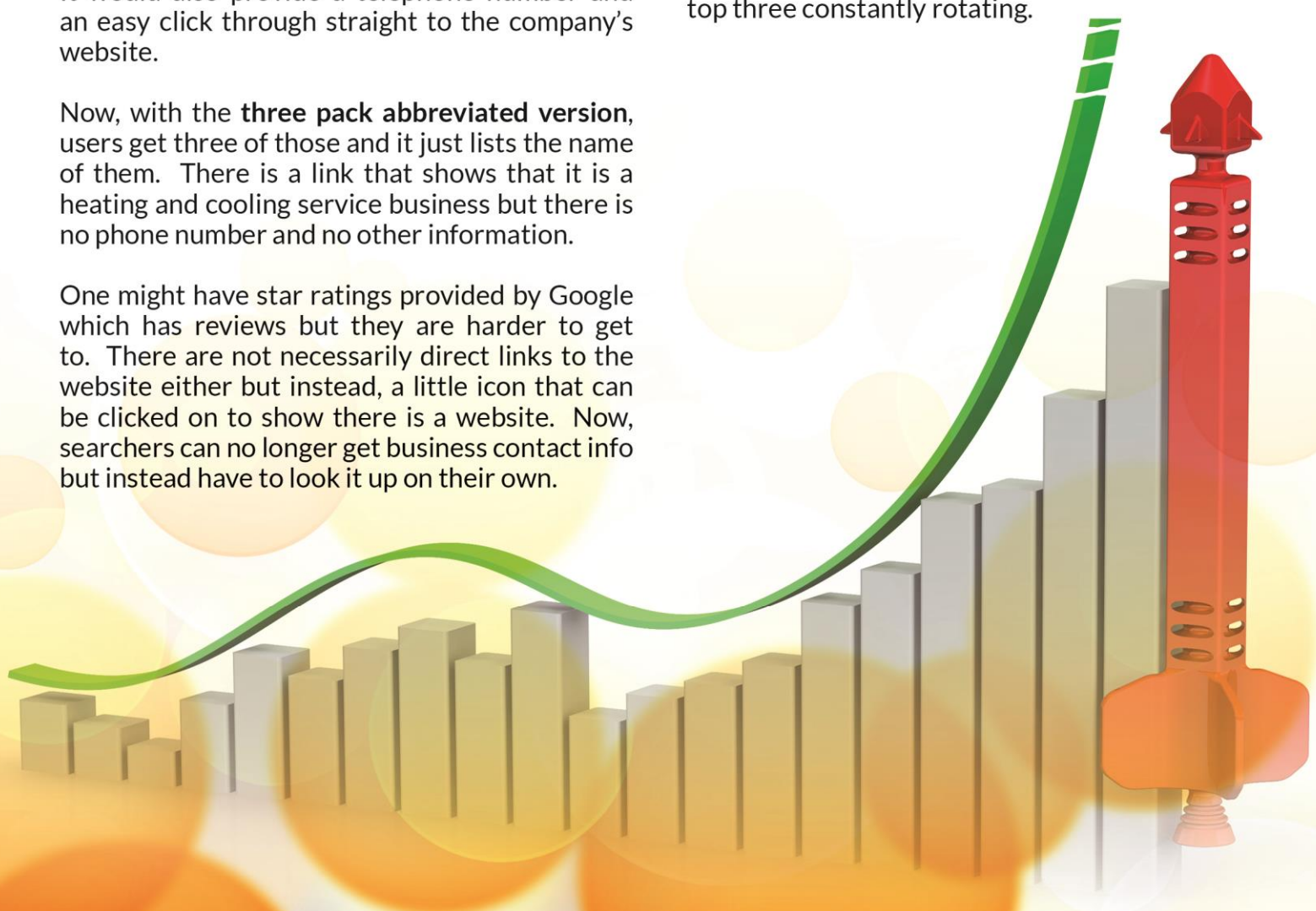
Previously, these businesses might have had a hard enough time to squeeze into first page search engine results to be found even in the top seven. Now with the top three only being listed, competition to make it to the snack pack listings makes it even more difficult.

While it is still early to tell, the Google update has made a significant impact but it seems to have a few bugs. However, if this is the way that Google wants to run their search engine results pages, the mogul will find a way to make it work.

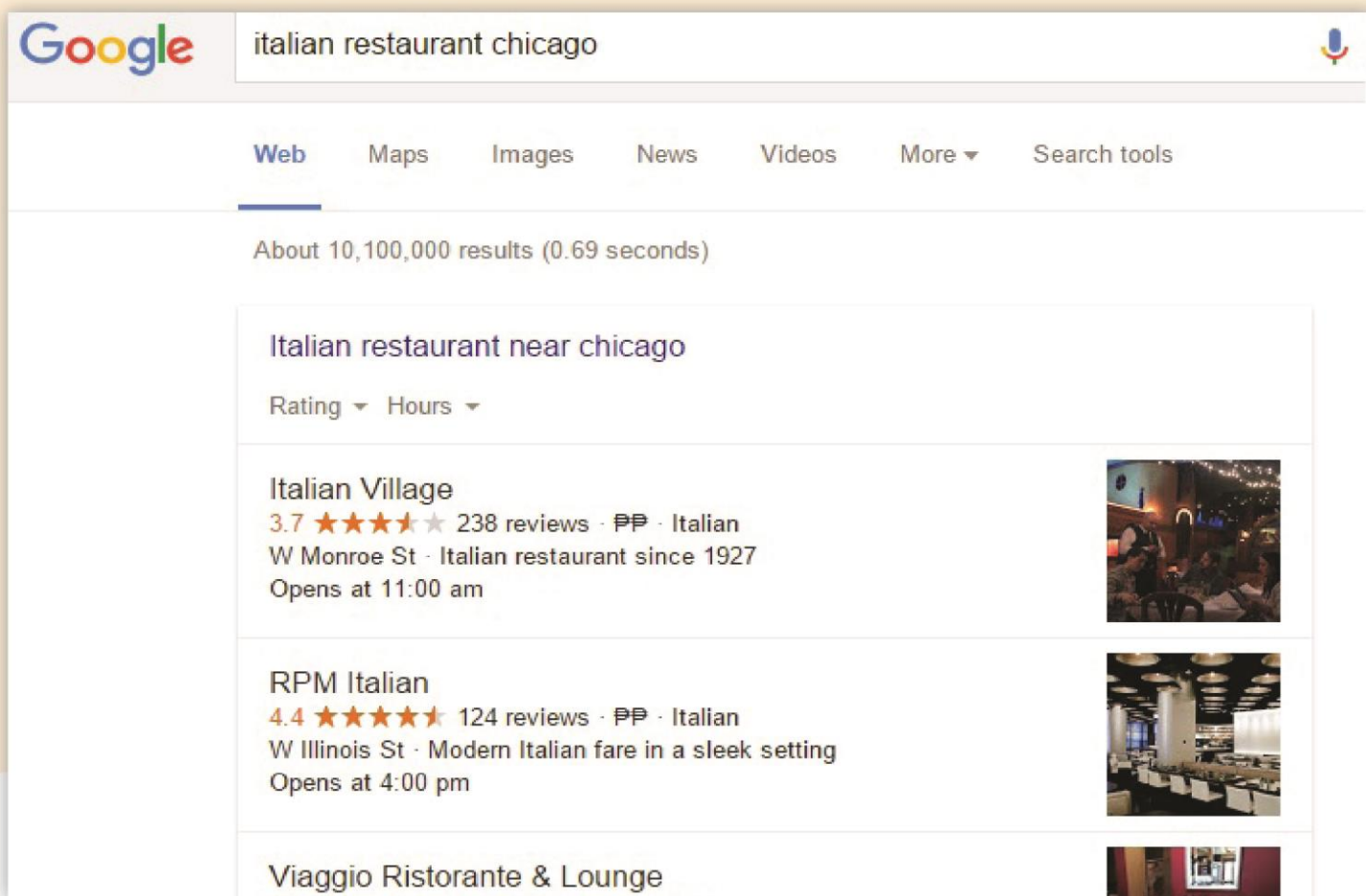
The Upside of the Shake Up

Perhaps looking at it initially makes it seem more difficult for local businesses, there is another way to look at it. The snack pack provides an opportunity for more exposure for more businesses. Depending on the actual location of where the searcher is, the top three local results actually rotate.

For example, if a user is looking for an Italian restaurant in Chicago, depending on where the user is in Chicago, a user might get a variety of different results each time they check it with the top three constantly rotating.



This means that if a user is in northern Chicago is looking for an Italian restaurant, they will see different search engine results pages than someone who is conducting a search while they are located in southern Chicago when using the words “Chicago Italian restaurants” for example.



The Snack Pack interface may seem a little bit limited upon first glance. However, it actually could be more beneficial. It could appear that if Google pages are not up to date with information on a certain business, customers could receive information that is incorrect.

This could lead to a business being found in a search but the information could be incomplete or wrong which is harmful to a business. However, if a business has a Google page that is up-to-date with correct information and reviews are positive, this new platform could prove successful for a business.

However, there is more to this update that business users need to know. Since Google My Business links and fly-out business cards have been disabled, searchers will turn to a map view that lists 20 businesses.

Also, most users who are searching for a business will look for organic results that appear more credible which means users will likely go straight to a business website or even business page directories such as Yelp.

Aim for the Top 20

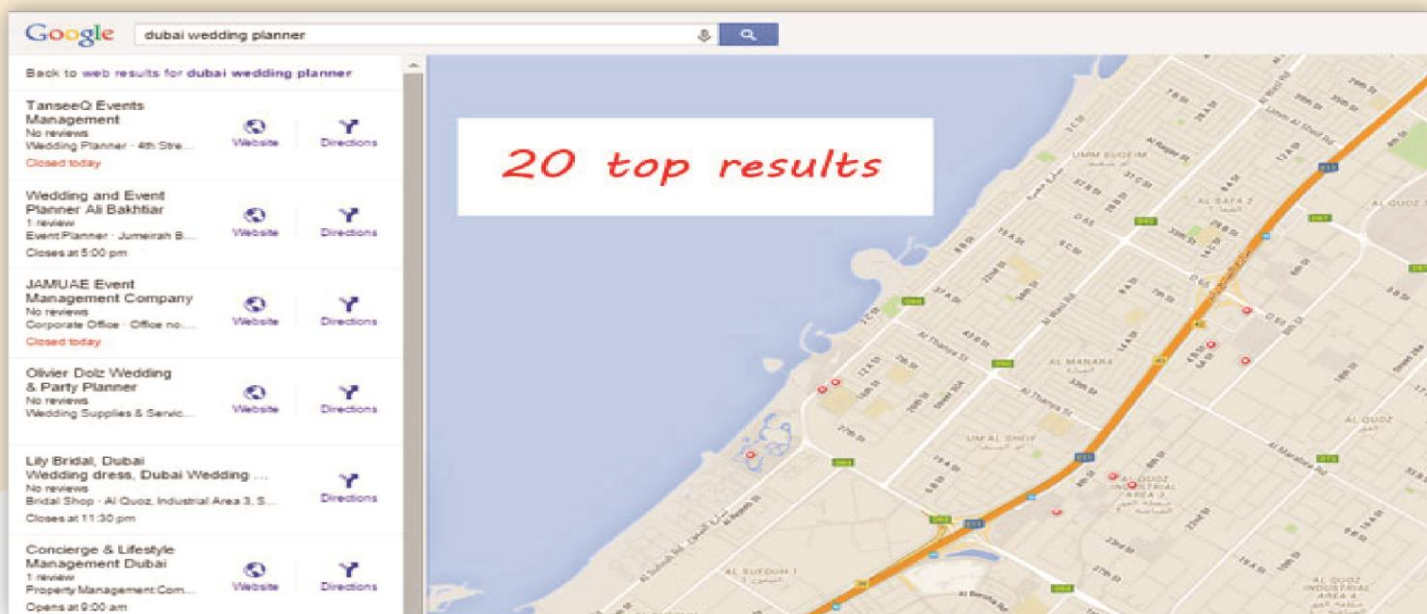
The major thing a business owner must focus on is whether or not contact information is up to date in all directories and on Google pages. SEO strategies can also be adjusted even if a business already has a proactive SEO team working on content.

If you, as a user, try to Google your business, you may not show up in the local pack. However, if you went a block away, you might show up immediately. These fluctuations make it really difficult to track using rank checking tools and technology.

Your ranking report might show a much different analysis when in actuality; your business is appearing in the Snack Pack for actual searchers using Google. Cynics think this might make local businesses turn instead to AdWords to pay for higher spots in Google's searches.

One solid tip to take advantage of is to make sure that your business appears on the map view among the top 20 which Google lists. For this

portion of a search, if someone is looking for an Italian restaurant in Chicago, no matter where that searcher is located, it is very likely that you will appear in the top 20 regardless of where a person is searching from.



The top 20 just might be rearranged depending on the user's physical location at the time.

What this actually means is that there is a more even distribution of visibility for the top 20 businesses. This might mean that you change your focus on marketing through Google and focus more on being sure that you are listed in the

top 20 map rather than the rank of a local pack.

A searcher can spot you if you are already listed in the top 20 but make sure that the snippet you are given about your business is a compelling one because your business name is just one among a long list of competitors. Even if you do not show up in the top three, that snippet can help steal customers from the competition.



Keep Your Info Updated & Positive Reviews are a MUST!

If you are doing good work at your business, ask customers to leave positive feedback to keep positive reviews on Google+ pages. Zagat and Yelp's webpages should also have positive reviews since users will be focusing on organic information.

In the image below, you will see how the reviews looked like BEFORE the update:



Homes For Sale in Raleigh - BerkshireHathawayHS.com
Ad www.berkshirehathawayhs.com/
Get Advice From Real Estate Experts See Maps, Photos, Schools and More!

Raleigh, NC Real Estate - Realtor.com
www.realtor.com > ... > North Carolina > National Association of Realtors >
Homes for sale and other real estate in Raleigh, NC. Find Raleigh homes for sale on realtor.com(R).

Raleigh, NC - Realtor.com
www.realtor.com/.../Raleigh_NC > National Association of Realtors >
420 Raleigh, NC rentals can be found here. Check out extensive listings for condos and homes for rent in Raleigh at realtor.com(R).
Raleigh Condos For Rent - Raleigh Houses For Rent - 10

Raleigh Real Estate Agent Linda Cr...
www.lindacraft.com
4.6 ★★★★★ 36 Google reviews · Google+ page

Fonville Morisey Realty Inc: Pool Mella
www.fmrealty.com
1 Google review · Google+ page

Howard Perry & Waiston
www.hpwreschool.com
Google+ page

Raleigh Regional Association of Rea...
www.rrar.com
3 Google reviews

Chelsea Realty Group
www.crgrentals.com
1.8 ★★★★★ 21 Google reviews · Google+ page

Allen Tate Realtors
www.allentate.com
Google+ page

A 7300 Six Forks Rd
Raleigh, NC
(919) 235-0007

B 5925 Falls of Neuse Rd
Raleigh, NC
(919) 872-4450

C 3801 Wake Forest Rd
Raleigh, NC
(919) 878-4040

Map for raleigh, nc realtors

Ads ⓘ

Top Raleigh Realtors
www.topagentsranked.com/ >
Compare hand-picked Realtors in Raleigh. Free, no obligation.

Raleigh NC Realtors
www.justcallbrenda.com/ >
(919) 434-3434
For Real Estate In Raleigh, NC
Call An Experienced Realtor Today!

Top Raleigh Realtors®
www.agentpronto.com/Raleigh >
Find real estate agents in Raleigh.
Free service to find top Realtors®.

And this is how the reviews (no longer called Google Reviews) look like AFTER the update:

Pizza near germantown tn

Rating ▾ Hours ▾

✓ Any rating

2.0 ★★★★★ and up

3.0 ★★★★★ and up

4.0 ★★★★★ and up

Garibaldi's Pizza
4.1 ★★★★★ 23 reviews · \$\$ · Pizza
Queens Ct · Long-running local pizzeria chain serving hand-tossed & Neapolitan pies, plus pasta & subs.

Memphis Pizza Cafe
3.8 ★★★★★ 19 reviews · \$ · Pizza
W Farmington Blvd · Enduring parlor dispensing thin-crust pizzas & calzones in casual quarters or to go.

More pizza

RUSO'S NEW YORK PIZZERIA

West St

ker Cit

You want your business info up to date and for this new search methodology to show a good representation of your business based on past customers in order to entice future clientele.

For the long-term, the focus of success not just for the three empty and coveted slots should be up-to-date information and positive customer reviews. Some may think this will change SEO strategies completely to try to get in those top three slots to eliminate the competition.

While this is true to some extent, the likelihood that users will only use three suggestions is very slim. Why focus on three options when users can look at 20? That is why the click through information is so imperative so users can be wooed by the true information that is posted online and through Google.

Regardless of where your business appears on any directory or database, ensure that all name, address, and phone numbers are current because this helps to build a page's authority. Plus, make sure these are standardized across all citations on other websites and directories.

Additionally, it's a good idea to make sure your opening and closing times are accurate and up to date. If your business is open on Sunday - but only during certain months, make sure that during the months that you are open on Sundays that you show that you are open.

If that desperate person in need of heating and cooling repair on a Sunday sees you're open and then finds your business is closed, you have lost a customer.

Main Strategy Focuses to Implement NOW

Continue to pay attention to external listings and on-site listings. Use Google+ for external listing opportunities because that is Google's go-to since businesses are using their own products.

Focus on these things to ensure the Snack Pack update works for your business, particularly in a Google My Business listing:

- Include an in-depth and unique business description that includes links and is correctly formatted
- Choose a business category that is correct on your Google My Business listing
- Upload several compelling and high quality photos and include a high-resolution profile image and cover photo on your listing
- Include a local phone number and utilize click-to-call tags in phone number listings
- Add any other business information associated with a physical address and ensure that the listing matches what is on your website and in other local directories
- Earn positive reviews on Google+
- Make sure that your website is easily accessible for mobile users and is user friendly on mobile devices

Embrace the Change as an Opportunity

Stick to these simple strategies and recognize that the increase in competition is actually beneficial to potential customers. Local businesses that make the effort to keep their business information up-to-date are businesses that show they care about the growth of their business and acknowledge that there is a need for an improvement for an online presence.

If a business cares about how they appear to potential customers, it is more likely they care more about offering excellent customer service too. In the long run, this technique might help the cream rise to the top. So be the proverbial cream.





PARTNERS IN PROFIT:

HOW TO USE HOST-BENEFICIARY MARKETING TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Establishing a new business – or growing an existing one – can be difficult. You might have limited money to spend on advertising and promotions. Maybe you put all of your available resources into setting up your store and buying inventory. Perhaps you are operating on a shoestring budget and need to save money wherever you can. Whatever the reason, you are in the market for ways to grow your business without breaking the bank. One way to do that is by creating a partnership with an existing business.

THE BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIPS

When a new business pairs up with a successful one, it is called host-beneficiary marketing. You are the beneficiary, and your partner is the host. Before we talk about how to identify and approach potential partners, let's talk about why it can benefit both parties to team up. If you own a start-up business or you're breaking into a new market, the benefits to you are obvious. You get access to an established customer base. They are qualified, meaning that they are in the market for what you're selling.

The benefits for your partner are a bit different. They get to provide their customers with a special offer or promotion that they can't get anywhere else. As long as they are convinced that you will provide good quality and service, it's an easy decision for them. Their customers will feel valued and special – something every business wants – and you will get the benefit of attracting new customers. Everybody wins.

FINDING POTENTIAL PARTNERS

The first thing you need to know is how to identify potential partners. It doesn't make sense to pair up with a business that is a direct competitor. They're not going to want to dilute their sales by sharing their customers with you any more than you want to share yours with them. However, you do want to pick a partner who is competing for the same market.

That might sound confusing, but here's how it works. It is very important to choose partners whose businesses are complementary to yours. For example, let's say that you just opened a bakery specializing in wedding cakes. It doesn't make sense to pair up with another bakery, but it makes a lot of sense to look for successful wedding planners, bridal shops, and florists who might be willing to join forces with you. Any prospective bride or groom is going to want services from multiple vendors.



A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a blue button-down shirt, is shown from the back and side, looking out a window. The background is a bright, out-of-focus view of a city or landscape. In the bottom left corner, there are several large, blue, stylized chevron arrows pointing towards the right.

To identify partners, look for complementary businesses in your area and ask these questions:

1. Is the business I am considering successful?
2. Do they have an established clientele?
3. Are our products or services complementary?

If the answers to all three questions are Yes, then you know that you have identified a potential partner.

PITCHING TO POTENTIAL PARTNERS

It is important to approach the partners you have identified in the same way you would approach a customer. Most importantly, the focus of your pitch should be on the benefits you are offering, not the features of your product. Here are some tips:

- 1. Know what you are prepared to offer before you meet.** Let's use the same example as we did before. You have opened a bakery and you want to pair up with a successful wedding planner. Decide beforehand what you are offering. For example, you might offer a free cake tasting and 20% off the price of a cake. The offer has to be attractive – something that will offer real value to your partner's customers.

2. Bring samples where appropriate. You don't want to bombard your potential partner with information, but it's a good idea to offer some evidence of what you have to offer. Using our baker as an example, it might make sense to bring a sample of your most delicious cake for the wedding planner to try. A florist might bring a floral arrangement. You want to demonstrate what you can do.

3. Be professional. It's important to make a good impression. If you come into your meeting and you aren't prepared, you decrease the chances that a successful businessperson is going to want to team up with you. Have your ducks in a row and know what you are going to say.

4. Follow through on any promises you make. If your potential partner wants to do business with you, it is extremely important to follow up quickly and professionally. You might be providing your partner with materials to pass on to their customers. For example, in some partnerships you might be providing a sales letter, postcard, or even an email for them to share with their list. Make sure whatever you give them looks great and is professionally written. Now is not the time to be sloppy.

5. Be open about other partnerships. If you are talking to several local business owners about

partnerships, make sure to disclose them up front. The last thing you want is to be accused of deception or dishonesty. If you do partner with more than one company, they will be unofficially linked by their involvement with you. It's only fair to make sure they know about it first.

6. Consider offering a return incentive. If you're just opening your business it might not seem like you have much to offer. However, it might sweeten the deal if you volunteer to reciprocate when you are more established, or even to offer a share of the profits. It might cost you some money up front, but it will be worth it in the long run.

The most important thing to remember is that you must choose partners whose businesses complement your own. It makes no sense for a bakery to partner up with an auto-repair shop. They might have a few customers who happen to be in the market for a cake, but those customers will be in the minority.

The goal of this type of partnership is to find qualified customers who are highly likely to be in the market for your product or service. If you do that, host-beneficiary marketing can be mutually beneficial – and a great way to get your business off the ground.



WHY YOU NEED A *Mailing List* FOR YOUR LOCAL BUSINESS

Do you have an email list for your local business? If you're like a lot of business owners, the answer is no. You might think you don't need one, or that you simply don't have the time to make use of it.

The truth is that building an email list is easy and inexpensive, and it doesn't have to be time-consuming if you have the right tools to manage it.





Benefits of Having an Email List

If you're wondering why you need an email list, here are a few of the benefits you can't ignore:

1. It gives you a simple, inexpensive way to communicate with your customers.
2. It makes it easy to segment your list and market to the people who are most likely to buy a particular product.
3. It can help you learn more about your customers. If you send out emails about different products and one gets a lot more attention than the other, it can help you grow your business and give your customers what they want.
4. It increases name recognition and keeps you at the forefront of your customers' minds.
5. It increases sales.

Not only is it a good idea to have an email list, it would be a mistake not to have one.

A recent study shows that customers who receive email newsletters **spend 82% more** when they buy from the company. ([iContact](#)) and **7 in 10 people** say they made use of a coupon or discount from a marketing email in the last 7 days. (Blue Kangaroo)

How to Get People to Sign up for Your List

Getting people to sign up for your email list might seem like a challenge, but it doesn't have to be. Of course, some of your customers may be reluctant to give you their email address, but here are some ways to incentivize them to sign up:

1. Ask them for their email address when they check out, and tell them they'll get a coupon or special offer if they do.
2. Put a postcard with your website and a description of the benefits of joining your list in their shopping bags.



3. Offer special incentives such as sneak-preview sales, coupons, and other perks that will be available only to your subscribers.
4. Post information about your list and the incentives of signing up on your social media accounts.
5. After you have a list started, include a “Share this” button at the bottom of your emails to make it easy for your current subscribers to share your offer with their friends.

As a rule, people love to get special incentives and behind the scenes information. One of the main reasons people follow their favorite brands on social media is to get exclusive content, and you can use that preference to build your email list, too.

If you have a website, it is important to have an opt-in form for your email list there. People who visit your site are already interested in what you are offering. One question a lot of business owners have is “Where should I put the opt-in form on my website?” Here are some tips:

- People tend to read web pages in an “F” pattern. That means that putting your opt-in form at the top of the page or along the left margin increases the chances that it will be seen.
- When people have skimmed the top of your page, they often scroll down to the very bottom. The footer of your page is another good location for your form.
- If you have a blog, put an opt-in form at the bottom of your blog posts. People who are reading your blog are already interested in your content, and it’s a natural place to have them sign up for your list
- Finally, you might consider using a feature box. That’s a highlighted, boxed off section in the middle of other content that asks people to opt-in to your list.

Any one of the above suggestions will help increase the chances that visitors to your site will sign up for your list.

How to Use Your List

Once you have started to build your list, it's time to find some ways to use it. The point of having an email list is to engage your customers and provide them with valuable content and information. The more useful they feel your emails are, the more likely they will be to stay subscribed and share your emails with others.

There are a lot of different ways you can use your list. For example, you might segment your list and use it to market to specific categories of customers. Imagine you own an apparel store that sells clothes for men and women. You might ask customers to choose which products they want to hear about in email, and then add customers to segmented lists based on their responses.

Another good way to use your mailing list is to announce the arrival of new products in your store. If you just got something exciting, you can email your list to let them know about it. You can think about including a short video. The arrival of a new product might be the ideal opportunity to share a how-to video, or even a simple unboxing video to show customers what they will get if they buy your product.

One of the best things about email lists is that they can help you grow your business. You can use your email list to send out information about sales and special offers. You can even offer customers on your list a special preview sale or sneak peek at a new product. A lot of local business owners hold regular events for people who subscribe to their mailing lists. It's a great way to make customers feel they are getting a unique opportunity, and to get them into your store at the same time.

Get creative with your mailing list. There are lots of things you can do to make receiving an email from you a fun and rewarding experience.

Tools to Manage Your Email List

Some local business owners hesitate to set up an email list because they think they'll have to spend a lot of time managing it. It's an understandable concern, especially if you are already working full time and managing social media accounts. The good news is that there are many tools available that will help you manage your list and get emails sent out in a timely manner.

MailChimp has free and premium versions of their service. The free version allows you to manage a list with as many as 2,000 subscribers. You can set up your list, customize sign-up forms, and use their templates to create professional-looking emails. Their premium options offer additional features including list segmentation and A/B testing.

ConstantContact is another great tool for managing your email list. They offer a free, 60-day trial and affordable plans. The basic plan includes all the list management tools you will need, including mobile apps and social sharing. The premium plan adds email automation, additional storage, customer surveys, and trackable coupons.

Either one of these tools will help you manage your list in a professional and affordable way. Automation is an especially nice benefit because it lets you write and set up emails in advance and send them out at pre-set intervals. That means that a lot of your email marketing can be as easy as "set it and forget it." Every business owner can appreciate that.

Setting up an email list doesn't have to be complicated and it can garner you some very impressive benefits in terms of increased customer engagement and higher sales.





How to Spy on **YOUR LOCAL COMPETITORS ONLINE**

Regardless of the type of business you own, you have competitors. Even if you own a store in a small town, the chances are good that somebody there is chasing the same customers you are.

Have you ever thought that it would be helpful to know what your competitors are doing to attract customers? You can walk into their store and look around, but that's not going to help you understand what's bringing customers to their door. What will help, though, is spying on them online.



WHY YOU SHOULD SPY ON THE COMPETITION



Some business owners recoil at the idea of spying on their competitors. The word “spying” can have a negative connotation, but in this situation it doesn’t have to. Certainly if you had a competitor who advertised on television, you wouldn’t run away or hide your eyes when their commercials aired. On the contrary, you would most likely watch them with a great deal of interest. You would want to know what they were saying and who they were targeting.

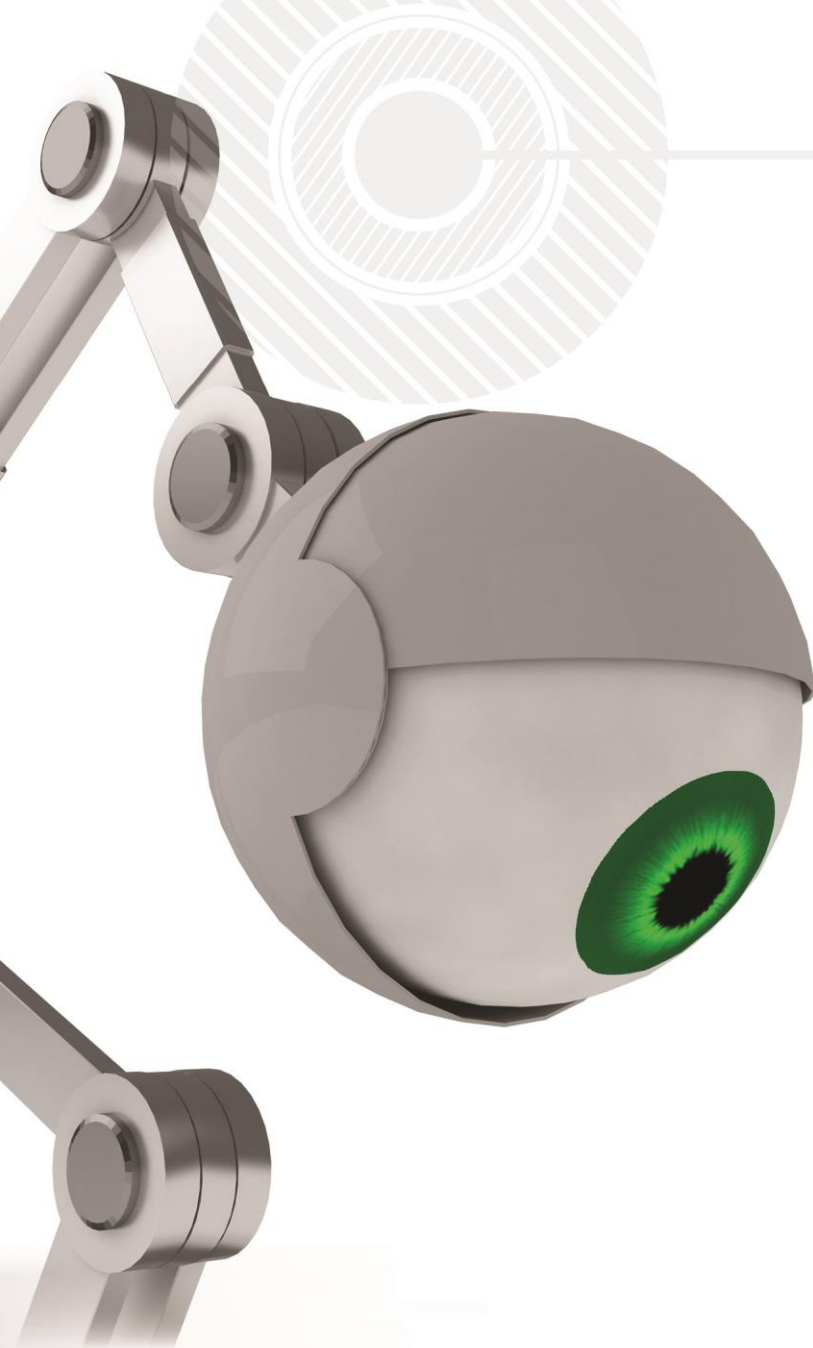
Spying on your competitors online is no different from watching their commercials or paying attention to their ads in the local paper. It’s a way of evaluating them. Not only can it help you understand who they are, it can help you spot opportunities they might be missing.

Let’s look at an example. Imagine that your competition has a Facebook page with a large following. When you look at the page, though,

you notice that there are some customer service complaints there that haven’t been addressed. What does that tell you? It says that they are not utilizing social media to improve their customers’ experience. That observation can point to an opportunity for you. Providing great customer service on your Facebook page can help you differentiate yourself from the competition.

In addition to spotting marketing opportunities, spying on your competitors can also help you:

- Understand how they want to be perceived online
- How they differentiate themselves from the competition (that means you!)
- What their future plans are
- How much traffic their website and social media pages get
- How engaged their customers are
- What their customers are saying about them



Gathering Basic Information

The first thing you need to do to spy on your competitors is to gather some basic information. For example:

- The URL of their website
- The address of their Facebook page
- Their Twitter handle
- The keywords they are targeting on their website

Once you have this basic information, you can use it to set up automated monitoring. There are plenty of tools that you can use, and many of them are free. Here are some of the most useful:



email every time one of your competitors is mentioned online. You can also use it to monitor keywords if you wish.

1. Google Alerts is a free tool from Google. You can use it to set up alerts and receive an



mentioned on social media, blogs, and videos. You can use it to search your competitors' names or keywords. They also offer the option to subscribe to an RSS feed for your chosen search terms so you can be sure not to miss anything.

2. SocialMention is a free search tool you can use to find out when your competitors are



grade based on how successful your online marketing efforts are. It is especially useful because it takes information from various sources to arrive at the grade, including blogging, SEO, and social media.

3. Marketing Grader is another free tool that assigns you (or your competitor) a



check out your competitor's backlinks – an important tool for SEO – and while you're at it, you can also check your own!

4. MonitorBacklinks is a paid tool, but they do offer a free trial period. You can use it to



5. Topsy is a free tool that lets you monitor your competitors'

The above information can help you do a better job of reaching your customers and differentiating yourself from the competition – and the only way to get it is to spy on your competitors. In case you need an additional incentive, it may help to keep in mind that there's a good chance your competitors are already spying on you! You might as well return the favor.

TOOLS TO HELP YOU SPY ON THE COMPETITION

It might seem time consuming to spy on your competitors online, but it doesn't have to be. You can take the time to gather some basic information on your own and then make use of the dozens of useful tools that are available to make the job easier.

activity on Twitter and other sources going all the way back to 2006. They have a premium option too, and you can monitor links, videos, photographs, and industry influencers.



6. SEMRush is another free tool that you can use to get tons of information about your competitors' websites. It will give you data about keywords, search rankings, keyword traffic, and ad performance. Even better, it puts all of your data into a nice, graphic format that makes it easy to read and analyze.

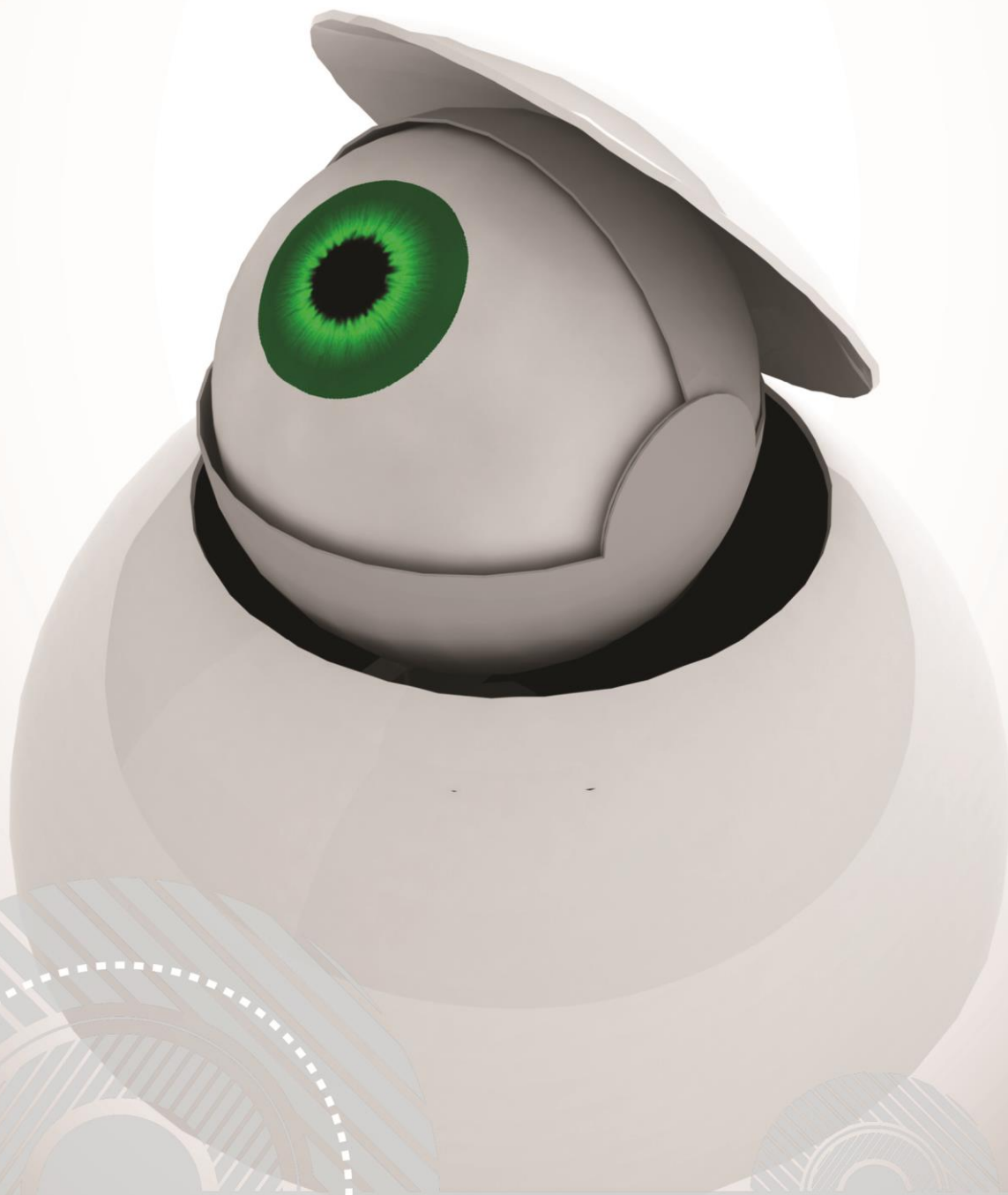


7. SpyOnWeb is a free tool that will help you track down any websites your competitors own. Some companies have blogs or secondary

sites, and SpyOnWeb will let you look up the sites by IP address so you can connect the dots.

These are just a few of the tools that are available to help you spy on competitors. Of course, it can also help to make some of your spying hands-on. You can learn a lot by following your competition on Twitter or Facebook, or by subscribing to the RSS feed of their blog. The main thing to remember is that the more information you have, the better able you will be to differentiate yourself from the competition.

As a local business owner, you know that you are competing for the same customers and sometimes you don't need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to marketing online. *Sometimes*; a little bit of smart spying can leverage the good ideas of your competitors into profits for your own business.



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