

Local Search Optimization

(Getting listed in Google+, Yahoo Local, Bing, Yelp, YP.com, etc.)

This is a free way to increase the visibility of your accounting firm on the internet. Essentially, this is free advertising but it requires some elbow grease to make it work properly. And because this is a free service, the updates are occasionally slow (e.g., they update periodically).

On the internet, prospects use a wide variety of online tools and websites to evaluate local businesses. These tools range from the local search section of the major search engines to online yellow page directories to review websites. To get a quick read on how easy it is to find your accounting firm in the local search directories, go to www.getlisted.org and enter your firm name and zip code. It's free. They will even provide you with a score. The results are not always accurate so use it directionally.

Local Search Optimization is NOT Search Engine Optimization

Local Search Optimization is about getting your accounting firm listed in YellowPages.com, Superpages.com, Citysearch.com, Yelp.com and the Local Search sections of Google, Yahoo and Bing. It is free and will increase your visibility and lead generation.

Search Engine Optimization are the techniques that a website developer does to make your website easier for the search engines to locate and elevate your organic placement in the search engine results pages.

Yes, these terms are similar and confusing but they are two separate efforts to generate more leads from the internet. Do both to maximize your lead generation.

Local Citations

Google and Bing use a term called local citations. Citations are mentions of your business name and address in other websites. These websites range from Yelp.com to YP.com to Citysearch.com to Superpages.com and others. Your goal is to consistently get your accounting firm listed in each of these online websites and provide them with compelling information (pictures, descriptions, hours open, method of payment accepted, etc.). The more information you provide them, the more compelling your listing is to a prospective client and the more likely the website will show your accounting firm higher in the listings.

That being said, Google and other major search engines do use Local Search websites to validate your information and give them the confidence to increase your visibility. If the search engine sees inconsistent information on the internet about your accounting firm, they will lower your placement because they do not want to provide incorrect information. To a search engine, incorrect information can include tiny differences like your address says Suite 111 on one website and Ste 111 in another and # 111 in another. Your complete contact information should be identical, everywhere. If you have several different websites, please use the main website that covers the majority of your services (generalist website). If you are inconsistent, this will be a problem because it confuses the search engines.

Google's version of yellow page advertising on the internet is now called Google+ Local, and it is free (for the time being). When done properly, this can increase traffic to your website and generate more leads for your accounting practice. They essentially are forcing you to use their version of Facebook to obtain top placement in Google+. If you elect to skip Google+ because you want to see how this shakes out and don't want another social networking account, we understand.

Please keep a list of your usernames and passwords for each because this process is iterative and you will want to update it over time. Yes, Google+ Local is very slow to update but understand that it's free.

Free Local Search Directories (do not pay for upgrade)

Google+ Local	http://www.google.com/places/
Bing Business Portal	http://www.bing.com/businessportal
Yahoo Local	http://listings.local.yahoo.com/
Yelp	https://biz.yelp.com/
InfoGroup Express	http://www.infogroup.com/our-services/local-search-optimization.aspx
Localeze	http://webapp.localeze.com/directory/search.aspx

Order of Priority

Below is the order that we recommend you follow:

- a.) Yelp
- b.) YP.com
- c.) Google+ Local
- d.) Bing
- e.) Yahoo
- f.) InfoGroup Express (this feeds many yellow page websites)

- g.) Localeze (this feeds many yellow page websites)
- h.) Citysearch.com
- i.) Insiderpages.com

Steps to Optimize Your Local Search Page

1. Locate your business on each directory and correct your listing. Each directory will force you to create an account with them (username, password). Save this in a file for future updates.
2. You MUST validate by phone or postcard. If you use an automated teller for your phone system, request a postcard be mailed to your office so you can enter the code validating that you are a real, genuine business at the address you submitted. No validation, no listing. Every detail should be the exact same (Suite, not Ste on one directory and # or Unit on another). Search engines want consistency and repetition before updating your contact info (they are looking for validation on the type of business, firm name, contact info, etc.). Search engines troll various directories and if they see inconsistency, your listing will not show up.
3. Complete Google+ Local profile fully (target 90-100% completeness score). This means hours of operation, business categories, 6-10 optimized photos and optimized video. A weak profile will not show up. This is essentially a free yellow pages ad, do it right the first time. This used to be called Google Places and is being replaced gradually.
4. Add up to 10 pictures to your accounting firm listing. Use combination of office photos, logos (firm logo, CPA, QB Pro Advisor, state CPA member, BBB, EA, etc.), local photos (SF Golden Gate Bridge, city skyline, etc.), and accounting type photos (your photos, supplement w/ stock photos if need be). If you add just 1-2 photos, your chances of showing up towards the top will be low. Pictures are VERY important to this process.
5. Insert keywords into photos BEFORE adding to Google Places/Google+ Local. Save each photo using a descriptive file name that includes your business names in conjunction with keywords (Your Accounting Firm name – Street Address – City – Zip – Local Phone). Use a slightly different set of keywords for each photo/image. Open the “Properties” of the image by right clicking the image file, select “Summary” tab, and complete as follows:

Title enter Business name and Business category

Author enter Business name, Category and Phone Number

Keywords enter Google category and City

Comments enter Google category and other Keywords plus surrounding cities/towns, (NYC CPA near Times Square, Midtown Manhattan CPA firm, etc.)

This is painful but important. Search engines can not read/view pictures and logos. However, they can read the descriptive text you provide so they know what you do and where you are located.

6. Update photos periodically (replace).
7. Optimize video similar to photo optimization above. Add up to 5 videos.
8. Some directories allow you to include social media to this (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.).
9. Google Coupons – Within the “Offers” tab, create 2-3 coupon offers (e.g., free initial consultation, free initial planning session, etc.). Rotate coupons on occasion.
10. Google Posts – Short messages above business description. Can be promotional. Lasts up to 30 days. Use keywords in your posts.
11. InfoGroup Express Update and Localeze (aggregators) - InfoGroup’s Express Update and Localeze provide hundreds of online yellow page directories with your accounting firm info. The contact information MUST be the exact same as above. The local phone number should correspond with the zip code (no 800 phone numbers).
12. Phone Numbers – Use your local phone number for your office. DO NOT USE toll free phone numbers (e.g., no 800 phone numbers).

Extra Credit

To elevate your accounting firm further, the next step is to obtain reviews of your accounting firm from loyal clients. This will help skeptical prospects to gain the confidence to contact you. Reviews will increase your visibility as well.

In summary, this initiative will be critical to generating more leads from the internet in the months ahead. As more and more people use the internet each day, it becomes more important that prospects can find your accounting firm on the internet and the message is consistent from Yelp to YP.com to various online directories that you’ve never heard of. This is free advertising for your accounting practice.