



The Local Search Primer

Maximizing Visibility and
Conversions with Local Search

Guidelines for Maximizing Local Search Results

What is Local Search?

Quite simply, local search are search results filtered to include only local business. All the major search engines have a local search ranking method that differ from organic search ranking, the results we think about when we hear SEO (search engine optimization).

The good news is that, right now at least, gaining visibility through local search is easy and costs you nothing except a few hours. 75% - 80% of your peer agencies have not claimed or optimized their local listings and the large direct competitors generally do not have local offices; that means that your agency does not have to compete against them in local search.

Why should you take the time to register your agency in multiple local search services? Consider:

- Today there are well over 10 billion unique searches done each month in the U.S. Of those searches,
 - ✓ 40% of queries have Local intent¹
 - ✓ 5% use the city and/or state name
 - ✓ 2% use informal terms, like neighborhoods²
- Very few SEO services bundle local search optimization, which uses separate algorithms from organic search, so competition for local search results is often less sophisticated
- Your webmaster probably registered your site with the major search engines when your site was new or if you undertook a major revision, but this is not the same thing as registering with local search
- Web search from mobile devices is increasing exponentially and mobile search is inherently local
- Google recently began including local search results, even when a geographic reference is not included in the search query
- Local search traffic is far more 'purchase ready'
- Your agency generally does not have to compete with the huge, national players, like GEICO for local search ranking
- At least as of today, there is a big window of opportunity for local agents to gain visibility, and business, through local search
 - ✓ 75% - 80% of local agents have not claimed their listing
 - ✓ Even those that have claimed their listing have generally only done so with one or two local search engines and have not fully optimized their listing

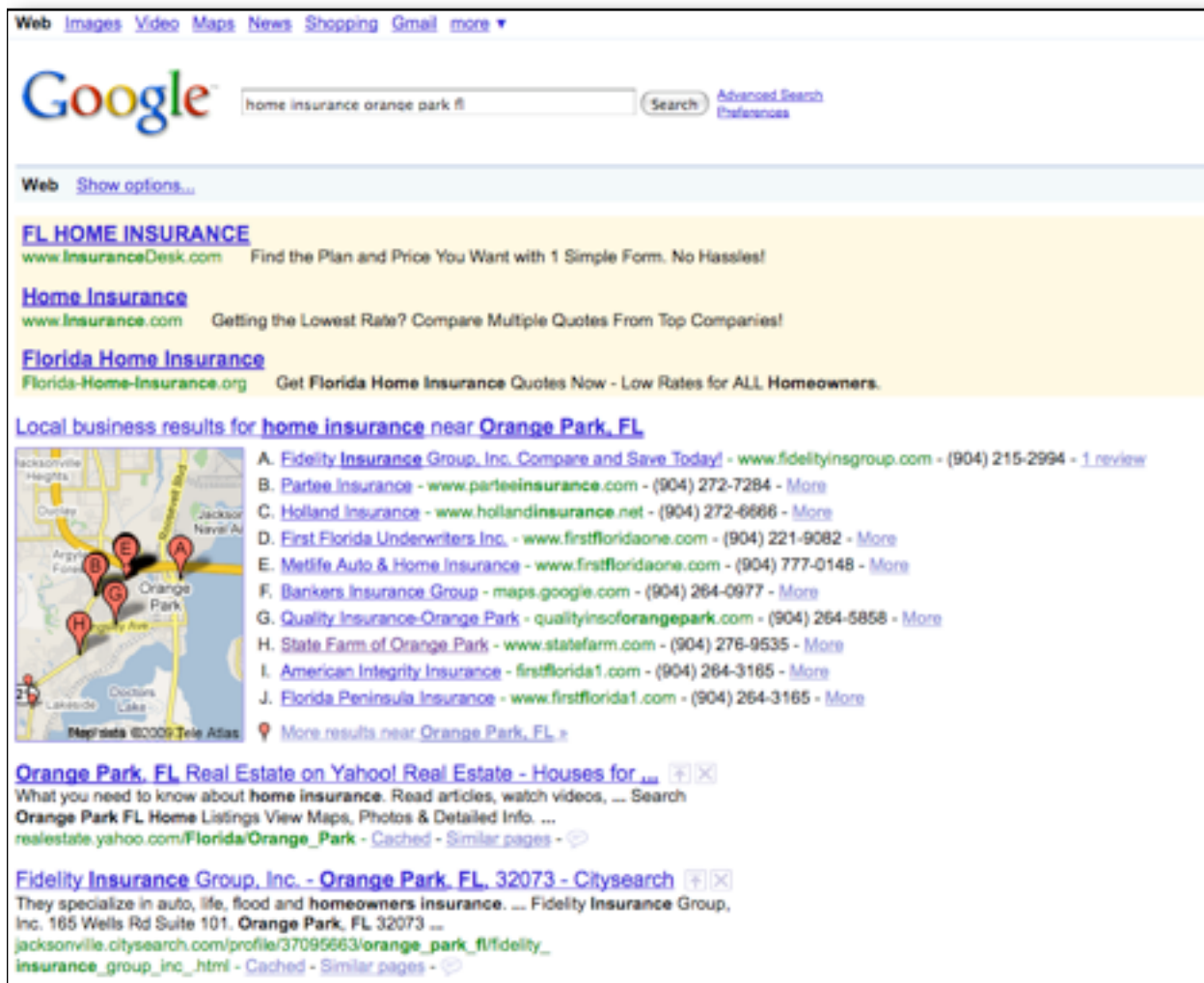
1. <http://urbanmapping.com/>, May 7, 2009

2. <http://getlisted.org/basic-business-listings.aspx>, June 10, 2009

This guide is written with Google Maps in mind but is applicable to other local search services. Google allows you to include more information with your local listing than almost any other service, so some of the recommendations here might not be applicable to, say, Bing or Yahoo! Local. But once you have completed your profile for Google Places, you will find it easy to update your agency profile with the other services .

What is Local Search?

This illustration shows a sample local search presentation, which appears at the top of Google search results, next to the map (Ten listings are shown here; Google has experimented with three and also seven page-one listings. Currently, Google displays seven page-one listings, also known as the 'seven pack'.)



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Web Show options...

FL HOME INSURANCE
www.InsuranceDesk.com Find the Plan and Price You Want with 1 Simple Form. No Hassles!

Home Insurance
www.Insurance.com Getting the Lowest Rate? Compare Multiple Quotes From Top Companies!

Florida Home Insurance
Florida-Home-Insurance.org Get Florida Home Insurance Quotes Now - Low Rates for ALL Homeowners.

Local business results for **home insurance near Orange Park, FL**

 A. Fidelity Insurance Group, Inc. Compare and Save Today! - www.fidelityinsgroup.com - (904) 215-2994 - [1 review](#)
B. Pardee Insurance - www.pardeeininsurance.com - (904) 272-7284 - [More](#)
C. Holland Insurance - www.hollandinsurance.net - (904) 272-6666 - [More](#)
D. First Florida Underwriters Inc. - www.firstfloridaone.com - (904) 221-9082 - [More](#)
E. Metlife Auto & Home Insurance - www.firstfloridaone.com - (904) 777-0148 - [More](#)
F. Bankers Insurance Group - maps.google.com - (904) 264-0977 - [More](#)
G. Quality Insurance-Orange Park - qualityinsorangepark.com - (904) 264-5858 - [More](#)
H. State Farm of Orange Park - www.statefarm.com - (904) 278-9535 - [More](#)
I. American Integrity Insurance - firstflorida1.com - (904) 264-3165 - [More](#)
J. Florida Peninsula Insurance - www.firstflorida1.com - (904) 264-3165 - [More](#)

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Orange Park, FL Real Estate on Yahoo! Real Estate - Houses for ... [+](#) [x](#)
What you need to know about home insurance. Read articles, watch videos, ... Search
Orange Park FL Home Listings View Maps, Photos & Detailed Info. ...
realestate.yahoo.com/Florida/Orange_Park - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [v](#)

Fidelity Insurance Group, Inc. - Orange Park, FL, 32073 - Citysearch [+](#) [x](#)
They specialize in auto, life, flood and homeowners insurance. ... Fidelity Insurance Group, Inc. 165 Wells Rd Suite 101. Orange Park, FL 32073 ...
jacksonville.citysearch.com/profile/37095663/orange_park_fl/fidelity_insurance_group_inc_html - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [v](#)

You Already have a Local Listing

You may not have claimed your agency's listing with Google Places or other local search engines, but you probably have a listing with most of the major local search engines just the same. In the absence of you providing information about your agency, Google will go to third party data sources such as InfoUSA and Axciom to gather information about your agency.

Information presented from these sources may or may not be accurate; it may or may not provide the level of detail you would like; and the information gained from third party sources may not emphasize key brands, services, or products you want to highlight. The best way to protect yourself from these deficiencies is to claim your agency listings now.

Another good reason for claiming your listing is to prevent a hijacking. It may sound overly dramatic, but it is fairly easy for a competitor to claim your listing and change the information included in your profile. Once you have claimed your listing, you protect yourself from this type of fraud.

Recommendations

Search is constantly changing, so some of the recommendations below may have more or less impact for you than they might have had at the time of this writing.

- 1. Consistency with Street Address and Local Phone Number** - Do not use P. O. Box addresses or 800 phone numbers exclusively in your local listing. Local search services try to validate your location. Neither of these references does that. It is OK to include this information, but you need to also include the local area code phone number and the physical address.
- 2. Keywords are Still Important** - Include keywords in your business category; e.g., auto insurance, home insurance, business insurance. Try to use a few of those keywords in your listing title and business description as well. If you represent insurance companies who advertise heavily and have high brand recognition, it is a good idea to consider these company names to be keywords. If you are looking for some ideas about which keyword terms to use, run some variations through Google's free keyword tool: <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>. Be consistent as you use these keywords across all the local listing and directory services.
- 3. Multiple Locations** - If your agency has multiple locations, take advantage and include multiple listings in local search. Be sure to use individual location contact pages for each location; multiple locations on the same contact page can confuse the search engines. As a corollary to this, use the enhanced driving directions editor as an opportunity to include place names that might be searched on; be sure to include the word insurance in the directions as well.
- 4. Citations in Online Directories** - Google uses citations - references to your agency that include location information - in the local ranking algorithm. That's why claiming

and updating your agency listing within multiple directories is so important. The chart at the end of this guide provides direct links to many online directories. Once you have clicked through to one of the directories, do a search using your agency name and city/state location. Claim or update your directory listing. If the search on your agency name does not turn up a directory listing, you may need to add a listing. Try to add or update at least 10 of these directory listings. As an alternative, for \$30 a year, Universal Business Listings will handle a lot of the updating leg work for you (<https://www.ubl.org/>).

5. **Reviews are Important** - Encourage customers to post reviews at your local listing. Reviews are influential in improving your local search ranking, and also contribute to higher click-through-rates (CTRs). Reviews that include keywords are especially helpful. At the time of this writing, many agencies in many locales, with one review, had one more review than their competitors. At the moment, that one review is generally the difference between showing up in the seven pack or down the list and off page one.
6. **Add Videos and Photos to your Listing** - There is not broad agreement among the experts about how much adding photos and videos help your ranking. But adding these items to your listing is easy and clearly improves CTRs. Visibility and page rank are great, but the point of all this is to write business; before that can happen, consumers need to contact you with a click-through or call through (phone call).
7. **Track Internet to Phone Results** (call throughs) - Consumers following up with your agency as a result of using local search are far more likely to call rather than initiate contact through your website. So it's still important to ask new prospects how they found out about your agency and track the number that respond with 'Google' or 'web search'. Consumers generally won't differentiate between local search, paid search, or organic search, but paid and organic search have their own analytics so you can always back into the number of phone calls originating from local search.
8. **Don't Forget External Links** (other websites linking to yours) - Inbound links are not nearly as important as citations and other factors listed above. Inbound links - quality first and quantity secondarily - have a big impact on organic search, but as much on local search. Still, the evidence suggests some importance, even for local search. That, and the fact that there is organic lift from inbound links mean you should pay some attention to these - but after you have attended to the other tactics. Local business listings, your chamber of commerce, and industry listings like your local IIBA chapter website are good places to start.
9. **Activation by Phone or Land Mail** - Each of the search engines has a verification step - either mailing an activation code to your business address or calling it in to your business phone number. If you choose the phone options, be sure to have a person answer the phone (not a recording) and be sure that individual is prepared to take down the activation code. The call will usually come within minutes, the mail follow up

can take several weeks. Once you receive the activation code, log back into to your local listing profile and enter it. Final activation from that point can take several more weeks, so don't be dispirited if you don't see results for a month or so.

Local Search Engines

Below you will find detailed guidance for claiming and optimizing your Google Places listing (Google Maps). But there are at least four other listings you should claim and optimize for your agency: Yahoo! Local, Bing Local, Yelp, and Best of the Web. The process will be similar to the one we outline here for Google Places.

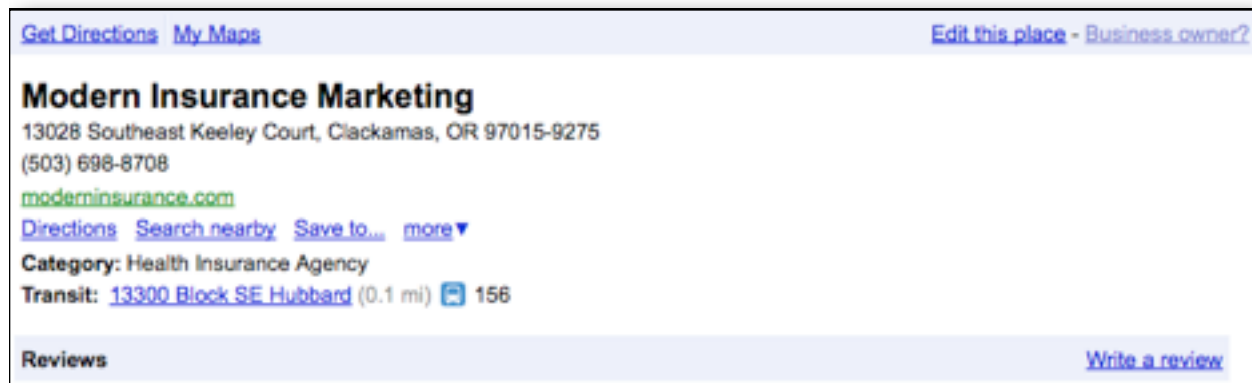
A good place to start is with this website: www.getlisted.org. By simply entering your agency name and zip code, you can see which services have been claimed and get a local search 'score' for your agency.

To add a listing with the other services:

- Yahoo! Local: <http://listings.local.yahoo.com/csubmit/index.php>
- Bing Local: <https://ssl.bing.com/listings/ListingCenter.aspx>
- Yelp: <http://www.yelp.com/business?country=US>
- Best of the Web: <http://botw.org/helpcenter/submitcommercial.aspx>
- (and of course) Google Places: <http://www.google.com/places>

... or, Find Your Listing to Start the Process

You can also start the process of claiming your listing by locating your listing via a search on 'your agency name' 'your agency location zip code'. For instance: search: abc insurance 32257. Click on the 'Business owner?' link to start the process of claiming and optimizing your listing.



The screenshot shows a Google Maps listing for "Modern Insurance Marketing". At the top, there are links for "Get Directions" and "My Maps" on the left, and "Edit this place - Business owner?" on the right. The main heading is "Modern Insurance Marketing" in bold. Below it, the address is "13028 Southeast Keeley Court, Clackamas, OR 97015-9275" and the phone number is "(503) 698-8708". The website "moderninsurance.com" is listed in green. There are links for "Directions", "Search nearby", "Save to...", and "more" with a dropdown arrow. The category is "Health Insurance Agency". The transit information shows "13300 Block SE Hubbard (0.1 mi)" with a bus icon and the number "156". At the bottom left, there is a "Reviews" section, and at the bottom right, there is a "Write a review" link.

Special Tips for Google Maps

Check list of information to include in your local listing:

The Basics

- Business location address
- Business phone number (local area code)
- Business hours
- Payment Types
- Insurance products (see 2, above)
- Special services, such as loss control and risk management (again, see 2, above)

Phase 2

- Add Videos and photos of your business
- Encourage customers to post reviews
- Inventory inbound link sources and begin to cultivate those.
- Add Coupons to Google Maps

Categories

Choose up to five categories for your agency. Current applicable categories are listed immediately below, but they change constantly so you may want to use this [category browsing tool](#) to check for updated categories.

- Auto Insurance Agency
- Dental Insurance Agency
- Health Insurance Agency
- Home Insurance Agency
- Insurance Agency
- Insurance Agencies
- Motorcycle Insurance Agency
- Renter's Insurance Agency

Notably missing is a category for 'business insurance'. To create keywords on your listing for that product and other products and services that may be missing categories, be sure to make use of the 'Description' box.

Service Area

Google will let you define your market area in terms of a radius around your office or by listing zip codes or city names. Take advantage of this feature.

Additional Details

You can also add more information, and product keywords, in the Additional Details area. Details you should create here include:


- Products - don't get carried away but definitely include the 8 - 12 most important to your agency
- Companies - these are local, long-tail keyword opportunities, so be sure to list your carriers
- Communities Served - use place and neighborhood names local residents are likely to use (e.g., River City, Med City, etc.)
- Counties and Metro Areas Served - use county names and phrases like 'Jacksonville Metro Area' or Jacksonville Metropolitan Area'
- Services - add any that are applicable to your agency. All agencies can include at least 'Free Quote' and 'Free Annual Insurance Review'; others you may want to add: Risk Management, Loss Control, Claim Administration.

▼ **Additional Details**

Please enter in any other details you want customers to know about your business, for example:

Parking available : Yes.

Brands carried : Sony, Panasonic and Toshiba.

: 

[Add another](#)

Coupons

You need to get a little creative here but including coupons probably helps your ranking with Google and coupons can also improve click and call throughs from your local listing. Of course, You will need to ensure that any coupons you offer are in compliance with your state's insurance regulations. But here are some possibilities:

- Coupon good for free insurance review and entry into prize contest
- Free gift (provided by insurance company, of course) with referral or review

Payment Options

Don't forget your insurance company payment web portals. Your agency may not accept credit cards, but your companies probably do. Include these options in your listing information.

▼ **Payment options**

Specify how customers can pay at your business.

<input type="checkbox"/> Cash	<input type="checkbox"/> American Express	<input type="checkbox"/> Visa
<input type="checkbox"/> Check	<input type="checkbox"/> Diner's Club	<input type="checkbox"/> Financing
<input type="checkbox"/> Traveler's Check	<input type="checkbox"/> Discover	<input type="checkbox"/> Google Checkout
<input type="checkbox"/> Invoice	<input type="checkbox"/> MasterCard	<input type="checkbox"/> Paypal

Photos and Videos

Including these items will help your local search ranking somewhat but they also make your listing more interesting to consumers. More interesting listings are more likely to engender engagement resulting in a chance to quote.

Photos you can include: Staff, Office, Involvement at a Charity Event, Agency Logo.

Videos need to be uploaded first to You Tube, a simple process with some positive SEO side benefits. Some video ideas: Commercials your local cable company may have produced, explanation of the review/quote process, explanation of the claim process, break down of policy coverage highlighting commonly misunderstood exclusions and limitations.

▼ Photos

Add flair to your listing: include photos of your products or your storefront. You can upload up to 10 photos. Please be sure they comply with our [photo submission guidelines](#).

Add a photo from your computer

Click "Browse..." to choose a file from your computer.

Add a photo from the web

You have uploaded **0** of up to **10** images for this listing.

▼ Videos

Enhance your listing by associating videos about your business. To do so, upload your video on [YouTube](#) and enter the URL below. You can include up to 5 videos.

Example:<http://youtube.com/watch?v=dFtfxv1JdXI>

You have uploaded **0** of up to **5** videos for this listing.

Reviews

Make it easy for your staff and customers to add reviews to your listings. Bookmark your listing url (i.e., web address) with each service and be prepared to send an email, including that web link, and the nice things your customers have said to you. All they have to do is copy the nice thing they said, click the link you provided, click 'Write a Review' when they arrive at your Google, Bing, etc. listing and then paste.



Directory Listing - For Citations

Name	URL	Cost	Comments	Type
411.com			Powered by SuperPages.com	
AllPages	http://www.allpages.com/about/listings-modification.html		Listings update 3- 6 months, data from Axciom through local phone listings -	IYP
AOL Local			Powered by yelllowpages.com	IPY
Ask City		0	Pulls most listings from infoUSA	SE
CalculateMe	http://www.calculateme.com/car-insurance/	0	appears to be for car insurance only	SE
City Data	http://www.city-data.com/profiles/add	free		
City Squares	http://citysquares.com/user/login?destination=business/standard	0	limited coverage - NE, etc.	IYP
City Waboo	http://advertise.citywaboo.com/signup/?id=add	0	paid levels	SN
Citysearch	https://selfenroll.citysearch.com/newpackage.do	varies	no free level	SN
CitySlick	https://www.cityslick.net/reg.php	0	to \$149 a month	IYP
Discover Our Town	http://www.discoverourtown.com/NewListing.php	free		IYP
DMOZ	http://www.dmoz.org/add.html	0	hand checked, so can take some time	IYP

Fave	http://www.getfave.com/fave/products	0	Video Yellow Pages & Business Community, free level and options to \$50 a month	SE
HelloMetro	http://www.hellometro.com/advertise/	\$15/month	fees start at %15	SE
Hot Frog	http://www.hotfrog.com/AddYourBusiness.aspx	free		IYP
iBegin	http://www.ibegin.com/business-center/submit/			BD
InfoSpace	http://www.infospace.com/info/kmaint/kdbadd.html	0		IYP
Little Engine	https://www.littleengine.com/signup.html	0	paid levels	IYP
Local.com	http://advertise.local.com/	0		SE
Localeze	http://webapp.localeze.com/extranet/		Info provider, one of big three	SE
MerchantCircle	http://www.merchantcircle.com/signup?variant=default&creativeID=12379608&tn=5149&group=5149&failsafe=%27http://www.merchantcircle.com/signup%27&signupOverride=True	0		DP
My Huckleberry	http://www.myhuckleberry.com/business/Join.aspx	0		IYP

Superpages	see switchboard above			BD
Switchboard	https://advertising.superpages.com/sportal/sportalFlow.do?flowExecutionKey=cBA5E55D2-7D43-2703-A3A0-EEFF488F523B_kAA6DC106-1798-B3D3-1B09-D8DEEC853F9E	0	Basic Listing	IYP
Topix	http://www.topix.com/advertise/	Paid		IYP
TrueLocal	http://www.truelocal.com/BusinessSuggest.aspx	0		
US Counties	http://www.uscounties.com/add_listing.html	free		BD
User Instinct	http://www.userinstinct.com/	0		BD
Valuecom	see US Counties			
Yahoo Local	http://listings.local.yahoo.com/csubmit/index.php	0		SE
Yellow Book	http://corporate.yellowbook.com/advertise/	0	It appears that 'free' listings will get you contacted by a sales rep	SE
Yellow Pages	http://listings.yellowpages.com/documents/special_offers/jump-aol.asp	0	free level with numerous paid options	IYP
ZoomInfo	http://www.zoominfo.com/Registration/Register.aspx?type=6			SN

Judy's Book	http:// www.judysbook.co m/biz	\$11 - \$50 a month		SN
Mojo Pages	http:// www.mojopages.co m/advertise-center	0		IYP

***IYP** = Internet Yellow Pages, **SE** = Search Engine, **SN** = Social Network, **DP** = Data Provider, **BD** = Business Directory*