

Knowledge Base: Digital Presence Management

Digital Presence Management: People Are Local

There's no obfuscating that truth. People might constantly be online, they might be sharing details of their lives with personalities across the world, but ultimately people are local. They shop local. They eat local. They live local. That means that no matter how big or small our world becomes, local will continue to be the operative word when it comes to online marketing.

This means that if you're doing digital marketing for a client, you have to be making sure your clients are targeting local. You have to ensure that their locally-relevant information is always available anywhere their consumer will be looking — at the right time, in the right place, with the right answer.

To understand how important search is, consider these facts:

- Google runs [over 12 billion searches per month](#), across all devices.
- 28% of all web traffic [is on mobile](#).
- When Google [last updated their search algorithm](#), they stressed that the future of search is in conversational searches, predictive search, and being able to answer questions. The first two have local impact.

The online marketing landscape can be daunting to any newcomer. There are a ton of new terms, nuances, tools, and players in the field than you may have realized before. We'll talk you through who the players are, what their roles are, and what pitfalls you should avoid.

Setting goals and knowing where the finish line is located will be the factor that separates the players from the pawns. It's paramount that you know how to define and measure success for you and your client, what kinds of strategies you should attempt for which client types, and where consumers are looking for businesses like your clients'.

Understanding Search

Not all search results are created equal. As a GeoMarketer or digital marketing strategist, you have to understand how search results vary across platforms, and that not all search engine results pages are created equal. In this article, we'll walk you through a SERP, what the various techniques for triggering localized relevance are, and some factors experts believe influence search results.

Breaking Down the Search Engine Result Page

Before we dive into anything else, it's imperative you understand what search results are showing you. Below is a diagram of a sample search engine results page with the various zones labeled.

[image removed]

As you can see, the search is automatically targeted to location, even though this screen capture was taken on a desktop and using a "clean" browsing instance — no linked Google account, no cookies, no browsing history. Were I on mobile, the map would be roughly centered around the device's GPS coordinates, and the search results would be targeted to pizza parlors within reasonable traveling distance from the centered location.

Note that sometimes "paid search" or PPC items will appear in the SERP. These will have a small "Ad" medallion beside them and look like this:

[image removed]

The last several updates to the Google search algorithm have increasingly emphasized the relevance of local in search — as is obvious by how much of Google's pictured SERP is centered around local results. As a GeoMarketer, this means you've got to be optimizing more than just clients' websites — you've got to be keeping their Google+ Local pages up to date, managing AdWords, and a host of other social media profiles current and active as a signaling mechanism.

Finding the Right Balance

Succeeding at local marketing requires a careful balance of organic and paid search techniques against robust and meaningful social media marketing. A lack of social presence can hurt just as much as not being search-indexed in the first place — especially in a Web 2.0 world. GeoMarketers must be familiar with the best practices and breadth of available techniques in order to deliver the most value to their clients.

Yext makes that possible by giving you a single dashboard where you can manage a range of locally-driven products for your clients, from listings management to reputation monitoring and more. Just like you use the AdWords dashboard to manage paid search across multiple terms and clients, so can you use Yext to ensure that your clients' correct business information is populated accurately across 50+ top publishers across the web, around the world.

Resource Allocation

If your clients have a physical location that sells products/services to customers, *local search is a necessity*. Communicating this to them can be a difficult sales pitch — that's why you've got to be proving value from the first invoice. You can quote statistics until you're blue in the face, but ultimately only results matter.

Only Yext can give you the kind of control you and your clients want, so that you can focus on GeoMarketing techniques beyond simple listings management. Be a better marketer.

Local SEO

It's not easy to see the difference between local and organic SEO. In fact, as Google has worked harder and harder to push Local Search to the forefront, the two terms would almost appear to be collapsing in on each other. However, there are still important differences between the two, and understanding those differences will make your job as a Geomarketer easier.

Local SEO: One Single Location

The central point to remember with Local SEO is that all the information you are "optimizing" is tied to *one location*. Whether that location has a physical address or is a service-area-business is irrelevant; there is still *asingle* location that is being considered.

Local SEO also lives and dies by citations. Citations are instances of an address and a business appearing together as (essentially) one unit of information. Citations can be structured — with the individual parts of the business name, address, and phone number delineated neatly as they would be on, say, a business card — or unstructured, appearing as a string of text. Citations are used by local-oriented search crawlers to aggregate and verify data and information about a business.

When a search engine returns local results, what powers those is the **frequency** and **consistency** of citations. The Google algorithm works by checking any one citation against all others. The more consistent the information is (that is, the more it is *corroborated* by the information market) then the more trustworthy Google believes that information to be.

By contrast, the more conflicting information there exists in the market, the more likely that information will be subsumed in search. This is worrisome if the information that *should be correct* but is too new to be considered trustworthy by the search engines.

Further Reading

- [Local vs. Organic SEO](#) from JSO Digital
- [The Definitive Guide to Local SEO](#) by Search Engine Journal
- [How Local Fits into Multi-Location SEO Campaigns](#) by LocalVOX
- [Local SEO Tools & Software](#) by Andrew Shotland

Listings

Any GeoMarketer worth their salt knows that the foundation upon which any campaign is built is **listings**. A business with no directory presence is a business effectively rendered undiscoverable — by search engines and customers alike!

A business listing consists of three key pieces of information: **Name**, **Address**, and **Phone number (NAP)**. You can include a multitude of other information — a website, menus, photos, business categories, and other fields and information. Business listings serve as signposts for consumers and corroborative

evidence for search crawlers. The more listings you have *that are consistent with one another* then the more crawlers and search engines trust that your business information is accurate.

In order for Yext to list your business across the network of publishers, your business *must* meet the following criteria:

1. You *must* have a physical store where you do business. If you're a virtual store, or a warehouse, your business will not be using Yext as it is meant to be used. By extension, your address must be a physical location — PO Boxes, shared addresses, or virtual office do not qualify.
2. Have a meaningful business name.
3. Have or use a local phone number. Some of our publishers require a strictly local phone number for your listing, and each location must have a unique number.

If your clients' businesses meet those criteria, then you're ready to dive into our guide to all things listings.

Back to Basics

Before we dive into guidelines and best practices for your business name, address, and phone number, let's get one thing out of the way: **the most important piece is to be consistent**. If you manage listings for a client outside of the Yext product, you'll want to match that info to what you put in Yext. That means *at minimum* the business name, address, and phone number are exactly the same as in Yext.

Business Name

It's no secret that Google owns a significant share of the search market. As such, much of what will make your business palatable and discoverable to Google will improve your search relevance to other engines as well. Google has [well-documented guidelines](#) about what constitutes a Place name, what characters and punctuation are allowed, as well as other notes about the titling of a business.

Recognize that only a certain amount of descriptors are allowed, and self-promotional phrases are strictly monitored.

Last, much like Yext, Google Places allows you to include a description of the business with the name. This space can (and should!) include specific keywords that tie back to your clients' enterprise. This field is crawlable and will help both search engines and potential customers better understand what the business does and why it's a relevant result in search.

In both Yext and Google Places, you cannot put a URL in the business title, and you should not put any address or phone number information into the description field.

Remember: the challenge isn't finding the perfect name for your business, but rather finding a name that *issimultaneously* descriptive while adhering to the platform's standards.

Categories

While a lot of things about GeoMarketing nuts-and-bolts are deliberately obfuscated from the public, experienced SEOs and SEMs have been able to guess, through trial and error, what is valued and what isn't. One of the most important things you can do for a business is choose categories well. Categories are a major factor in what search engines surface based on keywords. There may not seem to be a huge difference between "pizza" and "pizza parlor" but if the latter doesn't deliver, it may lose in searches for the former — *even if* the searcher is on mobile.

Yext does much of the "heavy lifting" for you by providing a centralized taxonomy of categories which are mapped 1:1 (or as closely as possible) to each publisher's categories. In Yext, you can select up to 10 categories, but **they must be prioritized** for you and your clients to see the most return from them. The reason is pretty straightforward — each publisher accepts a limited amount of categories from Yext. As such, if a publisher only accepts 2 categories, it's imperative the topmost relevant categories lead the list.

Last, choosing the *correct* categories. An enterprise that is uncategorized, or even miscategorized, will suffer. If the business cannot be found, it cannot be patronized, and it cannot benefit from GeoMarketing tactics.

Customer Reviews

Reviews and ratings are a way for customers to either tip good service, or out enterprises that are skating by knowing there are few options in the area for consumers to pick from. A good review can tip a business into the green on some sites, while a bad review could spell death for a client's enterprise.

Most publishers who accept reviews have fairly strict restrictions about soliciting them. For example, [Yelp's guidelines](#) about soliciting reviews are pretty cut and dry. Google also [discourages users being compensated for reviews](#). The [FTC has strict rules about disclosure](#), and violating these can open up both the enterprise and the reviewer to serious legal ramifications. There was a major lawsuit around this [as recently as 2013](#). Purchasing fake reviews is illegal and could get your business blacklisted from key publishers. Don't risk it.

Ultimately, while reviews and ratings have an unknown impact on your SEO, they *undoubtedly* affect customers choosing your clients' businesses over others. Paying attention to which listings and which verticals have/encourage reviews can make a difference in how many customers your clients convert from views to visits.

Photos and Videos

Rich media content — such as photos and promotional videos — are a great way to make your clients' businesses stand out in results. As Google includes more rich media with its search results, other publishers will invariably follow suit; including rich media that accurately reflects your clients' branding and aesthetic will make them stand out for the right reasons.

Yext makes it extremely easy to attach rich media to all your listings for a client. Our Dashboard allows you to not only ensure that the client's information is accurate and consistent, but also that the rich

media included with each listing is identical on every one of our publishers. This gives you more control over the branding and the image (literal and metaphorical!) that the business displays to searchers.

Social Media

As social media becomes more important in the wider digital space, so does it become more important in the local listings space. Yext allows you to ensure you're keeping your messaging across multiple platforms, such as Facebook and Foursquare. You'll also want to connect your Google+ page to share reviews and rich media, but that page will also require manual management to ensure optimization.

Ultimately, you should use social to enhance your listings, and **not** in lieu of proper listings management. Social media is a value-added, not a value-proposition.

Citations, Links, and Other

Every time your business appears on a site, with its name, address, and phone number listed out, this is called a **citation**. Search engines look for citations — both structured (formatted) and unstructured (a single line, e.g. in a footer) — to verify businesses for their maps or to validate relevance in search. While crawlers prefer structured citations (e.g. a listing on an IYP site) unstructured ones are also scanned.

Search engines also look at inbound and outbound links to/from your clients' website. The most publicly documented aspect of Google's search algorithm is its [PageRank](#). PageRank looks at the "link density" of a page, or how many *other* pages are linking to that place. Some sources are considered more trustworthy than others, as well. For example, academic pages' links are weighted significantly more than personal hosts or domains. As such, it's important to know which sites are linking to your clients' website and ensure you have as much control over that as possible. Only Yext can guarantee that for you.

Last, web crawlers aren't human beings, and identifying meaning from context isn't something technology is capable of yet. One of the most important ways you can ensure that your data is "read" correctly by the crawlers and bots is to mark it up using [SCHEMA](#), a markup language embeddable in HTML that indicates microdata and metadata as being of certain types. In other words: SCHEMA effectively acts like a highlighter, pointing out what *type* of information is visible/available on a page what it signifies. This allows crawlers to recognize addresses, phone numbers, and business names for what they are, rather than simply as generic strings of text.

Ultimately, the most important thing you can do is ensure you are using Yext in conjunction with other efforts to address [top search ranking factors](#), and mitigating your clients' risk as much as possible.

Categorical Taxonomy

Most publishers will require that you choose some amount of categories (usually somewhere between 2-10) to go with the business listing that you're either creating, claiming, or registering. Categories are one of the three primary ways a business is surfaced: (1) keywords in business name; (2) keywords in business description; (3) business categories. Many publishers will also choose a selection of listings within a certain category to display in a "related" widget area.

As [you can see](#), categories are considered by GeoMarketing experts to be the *single most important* factor in search rankings. Categories are the primary point of discoverability for a listing. By neglecting to select — or, worse, *incorrectly selecting!* — categories, you endanger your client's business. Making a business *more difficult* to find does them no favors for their SEO.

Yext, by nature of the relationships we have with our publishers, does a lot of the heavy lifting for you. Categories in Yext's dashboard are carefully mapped to equivalent publisher categories, meaning you never have to wonder if the category you're choosing on one vertical is the equivalent category on another. With Yext, you can rest assured that one choice is the right choice in 50+ places.

For more on the importance of categories, check out this article from Search Engine Land: [Double Your Traffic Using Optimal Category Names](#).

Verifying and Claiming

While Yext takes most of the pain out of manually claiming listings on many of our publishers, you are likely still going to have to claim certain listings for your clients without our help. Fortunately, this section will serve as a guide to the general verification and claimant process. As a GeoMarketer, you've got to be able to take control of a "wild" listing in order to whip it back into shape.

Find Existing Listings — Yext's [Identify Listings](#) feature makes this as simple as possible, allowing you to manually select or alter listings on each publisher. Yext matches using your business name, address, and/or phone number, meaning as long as *one* dimension matches, your listing will be synced to that one. Most publishers match based on the same criteria if you want to find an extant listing for your client's business. Bear in mind: a "wild" listing may have only one of these primary fields even close to current. As a GeoMarketer, it's imperative you know any previous names, former locations, or prior phone numbers for the business in order to match, lock, claim, and/or verify correctly.

Gut Renovation of Listings — Once you've gone through and claimed any non-Yext listings, you'll want to update and overhaul any/all out of date or incorrect information. Remember: for maximum impact, all information *must match what you put in Yext*. If you don't match the NAP information on (for example) an industry-specific vertical, you risk creating and/or perpetuating duplicates and inaccuracies in the local marketing ecosystem for your client. In doing so, you undercut any ROI that you've promised them.

Get Verified — A number of publishers have some sort of verification process to ensure that your business is legitimate and in operation. Verification may seem like an extra step, but it works to prevent fraud and ensure the end-user has the most positive experience possible. Verification occurs in one of three ways: (1) An immediate phone call or email where you (or your client) inputs a PIN; (2) A postcard or other mailing with a PIN for you or the client to input; (3) Via email where you or the client clicks on a verification link. Ensure that, if you go the postcard route, that your client's staff is aware of and on the lookout for the mailing.

Remember that while most Yext publishers will have your client's listings up near-instantly, some have a longer lead time than others. This will be true for non-Yext publishers as well. You'll need to be patient as well as vigilant; check regularly for listings, and *don't* submit updates to a listing that isn't live yet.

Google — Google deserves special mention just because their process, while not significantly different from what has been outlined above, has a few notable quirks. You can convert a listing from a Google Places page to a Google+ Local page, but doing so will trigger a verification step *even if your Places page is verified*. Also note that Google defaults to a postcard for verification, but you *can* do phone verification if you request it. Last, editing any of the core listing info (i.e. NAP) requires re-verification. For more information see [this Google support article on verifying a business](#).

Last, make sure you're tracking which verticals you're managing manually, using either a spreadsheet or some other content/customer management tool. Ensuring that your staff doesn't duplicate each others' work means you won't be creating duplicates for a client, either!

All About Citations

Citations are essentially the backbone of the local movement. They're a key component of search engine algorithms, and [four of the top ten ranking factors](#) have to do with citations in one form or another. Yext creates citations on some of the most important listings sites on the internet. These sites have a huge amount of name recognition and link density.

But just as *where* your business is listed matters, so does *how often* it's listed correctly. The more your business is listed, consistently, across the internet on different publishers, the more likely it is that your client's business will see search rank lift. For service-area businesses, who often don't have an official website, having numerous, correct, consistently formatted listings across numerous publishers is paramount to their success.

In this section, we'll dive a bit deeper into citations: where do they come from, identifying top citation sources, and why Yext makes citations easier than ever.

Where Do Citations Come From?

While your business's information can be placed on any number of thousands of places on the internet, there's a relatively finite number of places that most reputable publishers pull from. The following are the top three most heavily weighted, based on the observations and testimonials of local search experts. As a GeoMarketer, you need to know where to focus your efforts so that your clients get the most bang for their buck.

Data Aggregators — Data aggregators (Factual, Neustar Localeze, Acxiom, and Infogroup) collect information about businesses using various methods, including submissions, and sell that data to various publishers, call centers, direct mailers, and other enterprises to use. Their information comes from a variety of sources, including business registries and phone records.

Locally-relevant search engines and directories — Fortunately for you, all of Yext's partner publishers are locally relevant, and being listed in their directory is advantageous for your clients. These directories

are also well-crawled by search engines, and some are even curated! While not every directory is created equal, those of repute will improve your clients' search relevance. It's important to make sure that any directory or locally-relevant search engine not in Yext includes a citation for your client's business. Moreover, that citation *must* reflect the same information you've input in Yext.

Industry-focused directories — While Yext has in its network some of the largest verticals on the internet, the industry-specific directories must be considered, as well. These directories — Care.com, Angie's List, Service Magic, Storage Front, et al. — by nature of being category-specific, often carry a lot of domain authority. This means that having a consistent, updated citation on these kinds of sites could impact your client positively.

Identifying Top Citation Sources

Depending on what category your client's business is in, some search engines and directories are more relevant than others. That is, some categories see better results from certain publishers than others. You can check this using [Whitespark's Local Citation Finder](#) (which requires registration) and sorting through the categories.

For example, FindLaw and Lawyers.com are the two topmost ranked directories for attorneys, with a heavier weight than traditional IYPs like Yellowpages.com and Superpages.com. This means that for any clients of yours who are attorneys, being on Yellowpages.com and Superpages.com is not as valuable as being on FindLaw. That's *not to say* they shouldn't be listed on Yelp, Yahoo!, et al, but rather that *in addition* to the broad base directories, you've got to target the heavy-hitting citation sources as well. This could mean anything from paid ads on Yelp to Google AdWords campaign centered around a Better Business Bureau search for a specific category.

Where Yext Fits In

Yext makes creating a broad swath of citations in one fell swoop as easy as three clicks. Once you have a broad base of citations that *you control directly*, building a wider array of citations in industry-specific and locally-relevant verticals is easier than ever. With Yext, managing, updating, and monitoring are as painless as possible.

Duplicates

Any GeoMarketer worth their salt knows that the greatest enemy a SEM faces is having to manage duplicate listings. It's hands down the most frustrating part of the job, especially as even *one* outdated data source can trigger the creation of new dupes. In this section, we'll go over what duplicates are, their SEO impact, and what you can do to prevent Yext from creating dupes for your clients.

What are Duplicates?

Duplicate listings are any extra citation on another publisher that is displaying information for your client's business. Duplicates crop up because of outdated information at data sources, business name changes, and a myriad number of other reasons. Ultimately, the most problematic aspect of duplicates is that they confuse search engine crawlers and potential customers alike; citations with incorrect or defamatory information that outrank legitimate listings will have a negative impact on an owner operated business.

What SEO Impact Can Duplicates Have?

There's a number of possible outcomes to allowing duplicate listings to persist for your clients' business. I've listed out the top three impacts that duplicates can have in the SEO ecosystem.

Who's On First? — Just like in [the Abbot and Costello routine](#), the worst kind of miscommunication occurs when there's confusion in the stream of information. In the case of SEO/SEM, sending mixed signals about the business to search engines and crawlers confuses and frustrates them and the customer. If you aren't keeping an eye on dupes, you could find yourself with a client unhappy that an inaccurate, outdated, poorly-reviewed citation is showing up prominently in search. As a GeoMarketer, you've got to have an idea of who's coming up first in search results.

The Trouble with Tribbles — Most publishers and data aggregators source their information from a variety of references. The process for this is a "tournament" that is [constantly running in the background](#), and every field is powered by a different source, with each field backed by a massive table calculating different levels of "trust" for pieces of information from each publisher. This is how a citation on certain publishers can be accurate but for one field, or one typo, or one element. Yext gives you the control you need to minimize this from happening — but Yext lets you control *one* listing per location per publisher. This means that if duplicates continue to exist, sites that *aren't* under your direct control could once more display incorrect or out of date information. You'll have to be vigilant in tracking non-Yext listings.

Search Engine Sophie's Choice — If you have an option of which listing to take over, you'll have to make a calculated decision. Remember: with Yext, the NAP information gets overtaken by our software, but there's no good way to consolidate information automatically. This means that things like reviews, rich media, and other factors need to enter the equation. You don't want to take over a listing with less reviews only to see the more-reviewed but inaccurate listing take over the results page. Weigh these factors when choosing which duplicate listing to take over versus suppress or request be removed.

Most importantly: remember that most duplicates are created by bots, machines, and software protocols! It's an ongoing job, battling and suppressing listings, but as a GeoMarketer, you're better equipped than most to handle it.

Preventing Yext Dupes: Identify Listings

One of the easiest ways you as a GeoMarketer can prevent Yext from creating duplicate listings for your clients is to take full advantage of our [Identify Listings](#) window. Below is a quick video with everything you need to know about the Identify Listings process.

Ultimately, using Identify listings prevents duplicate creation, ensures that Yext takes over the *right* listings, and gives you control over your client's representation in the Local Search marketplace. Though it may seem tedious or time consuming, it's a tradeoff: a little work up front prevents having to constantly play [whack-a-mole](#) with duplicates on *every* publisher.

The Local Data Ecosystem

There's a lot of coverage analyzing how/where data flows in the local data ecosystem. It's no surprise that Google, owning such a significant stake of the search market, is the central node in the model. However, Google deliberately obfuscates its data sources and their weighting. To that end, even the most authoritative source on the local data ecosystem is partially based on guesswork. It maybe *informed* guesswork, but the primary piece you need to understand as a GeoMarketer is this: no one, short of a handful of engineers sworn to secrecy, knows for *certain* what goes into Google's data compilation process.

That said: we can make some educated guesses! Using some basic trial and error, as well as long-term observations and official documentation, it's possible to map a considerable amount of the local data ecosystem.

Chances are you've seen the "spaghetti" diagram cited on various other SEO/SEM blogs and sites. It's a great starting point for the conversation about the local data space.

However, in our opinion, [the diagram is too simple](#). It lacks a third axis to demonstrate a certain nuance: impact and control. In the local data space, not all publishers and aggregators are created equal, with some able to influence the market more than others. To that end, we redesigned the most popular diagram of the ecosystem to illustrate this dimension.

There are other nuances, as well: these sources and compilations change from country to country, meaning that a GeoMarketer in Germany or Latin America is going to have a distinctly different local marketing ecosystem than one in the United States. The publishers, aggregators, and those who constitute the biggest players in the field will be drastically different in different nations. While most of our material is targeted towards a US-based GeoMarketer, there are a number of resources for non-US marketers as well.

Last, because aggregators' data is not the *only* source of information in the ecosystem, and because it's rarely easy to know if/when a publisher has purchased updated data from an aggregator, it is arguably more effective to make corrections to citations at the *publisher level* rather than at the aggregator level. While this may seem counterintuitive, realize that ultimately you can either (attempt to) control one input of many, or you can work to exert control over the actual end product that potential customers see. It doesn't take the likes of Nate Silver to see that concentrating one's effort "upstream" at the aggregators could actually have a net negative effect on a client's business.

Fortunately, as a GeoMarketer and Yext Certified Partner, you have the ability to have all your bases covered.

Review Monitoring

Reviews are, arguably, the currency of the local data economy. If listings are the infrastructure, then Reviews are the road signs and rest stops — they effectively make and guide consumer choices. What

other customers say about your clients' business has more impact than ever before. Dare we say it: reviews can be the tipping point between a business making it and a business going under.

For the GeoMarketer, this means that knowing how to handle reviews, and what a business can and cannot do about reviews, is becoming a key part of your job function. (In essence, review monitoring and management.) In this section, we'll talk about building a review strategy, how to avoid trouble with the FTC with regards to reviews, how to respond to reviews, and what "reputation management" (the buzzword du jour) really means.

Ultimately, with these tools, you'll be able to both protect *and* promote your clients' business without running afoul of a publisher or Johnny Law.

Building a Review Strategy

As the time-management pundit Alan Lakein famously said, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." Nowhere is that more true than with reviews. Here are three points to bear in mind as you build our your review strategy for your clients.

Decentralize

It's easy to think that all of your reviews should just be on the main review purveyors: Yelp, Foursquare, Google+, et al. However, this is only partially true. Sites like Tripadvisor, Insiderpages.com and CitySearch.com (the last of which is part of the Yext network!) also have their reviews indexed and collected by search engines like Bing and Google. This can be both a blessing and a curse; positive reviews get incorporated on a number of platforms — *but so do negative ones!* While positive reviews are supportive of the work your clients do, a negative review visible on multiple SERPs could mean that single review has more impact than it rightfully should. For more information about review syndication, see [this chart by Phil Rozek](#). (Also, note that [negative reviews aren't inherently damaging](#) to your clients' business!)

Furthermore, decentralization protects your clients from any single publisher going under. That's insurance against a site closing its doors (metaphorically) and taking with it any/all positive buzz about a business. Lastly, many SEOs believe that a diversity of reviews (both the language in them as well as which publisher they're on) is a positive weighting in one's search relevance.

Find Headliners

If you aren't sure which sites you should be suggesting satisfied customers leave reviews on, we suggest doing a quick search for the industry and location that your client is involved in. For example, if you are representing a dentist in Akron, OH, you'll want to first open up an incognito or private browsing window, then run a search on your favorite search engine for the keywords **dentist Akron, OH**. Then, take a note of what directories and publishers populate the top page(s) of results. Some of these may be vertical specific (certain industries, such as dentistry or childcare, have well-established industry-specific directories) while others may be broad base review sites such as Yelp. Knowing which ones show up highest in results will inform your review strategy: which window clings to put up in your clients' business, which social widgets to include on a client's website, which site's reviews to publicize on their social pages, etc.

Follow the Competitors

Ultimately, the most important thing you can do for your clients as a GeoMarketer is make sure that they're present on any reviews site their competitor(s) is/are. Consumers can't make a choice between two businesses if one business isn't represented at all. For your client, they can't compete if they aren't in the game.

As with the previous section, open up an incognito or private browsing window and run a search on their competitors. Look closely to see which directories come up first, and whether those accept reviews. Note these details and then ensure your client is listed in those places as well. Then, begin encouraging customers to leave reviews about their experiences on these sites.

Sharing Reviews

Don't hesitate in sharing reviews on your clients' social platforms. Tweet good reviews, thank positive reviewers on Facebook, and just generally be both gracious and outspoken about positive press on behalf of your clients. It earns a lot of goodwill as well as being one less piece of content for you and your team to have to create on the client's behalf.

Suggestions vs. Solicitation

There's a pretty fine line between *suggesting* customers leave reviews for your clients' business, and what the publisher (or, possibly worse, the FTC) considers *soliciting* reviews for the business. Knowing the difference and what has been outlined as unethical behavior isn't just useful — as a GeoMarketer, it could be what prevents a lawsuit against you and/or your client!

What is a Suggestion?

Every publisher has specific rules about reviews. Most, however, agree on three points:

- **Reviews must be uncompensated.** — This is in part due to [FTC guidelines surrounding "paid" reviews and disclosure laws](#). (Take the time to educate yourself about these guidelines so that you can respond to clients who request this option in a meaningful, informed way.) Furthermore, publishers often feel like paid reviews are disingenuous and don't inform or benefit the consumer. To that end, publishers have removed large amounts of reviews from their sites in the past — reviews both positive and negative, which they felt were not made in good faith but were rather fake or compensated.
- **Reviews must be genuine.** — Reviews which are made by teams (often located in developing nations, where labor is less expensive) of people who leave a large number of positive reviews or comments in an effort to drown out any negative press. The problem is that many of these teams lack English fluency, so the reviews are too-easily spotted as fakes because the same review is left by multiple user names or the language is essentially unreadable. As technology has improved, these are spotted programmatically faster and faster. As such, it's better if a review is in a foreign language but fluent rather than in immature English. Furthermore, forego hiring such teams. In fact, as we'll cover later, fake reviews can land you and your client in hot water!

- **Reviews must be substantive.** — Most publishers prefer (and weight) medium-length reviews the most, and many publishers’ review spotlight algorithms can identify sophisticated language and use of good details that reflect the best received reviews, positive or negative alike. Encourage good-quality reviews by only sharing reviews of substance rather than one-line, “This place is great!” reviews (save for a platform like Foursquare, where such tips are explicitly encouraged) on major verticals.

Last, recognize that the best defense is a finely-tuned offense. Instruct — in fact, outright coach! — your clients in what language they and their staff should use when a customer expresses that they’ve received impeccable service. Ask clients to instruct staff to learn how customers heard about the business. If they find, for example, a customer is a consistent Yelp reviewer, they should *suggest* the customer leave a review about the service on their favorite review site — stay generic (don’t mention any publisher by name — this is part of Yelp’s guidelines!) and consistently use the word “suggest” will make clear the nature of the request.

In fact, this bears repeating all-caps in large font:

**DO NOT HAVE CLIENTS EXPLICITLY SUGGEST
CUSTOMERS LEAVE REVIEWS ON YELP.**

Yelp is the most notorious publisher, but ANY publisher could quickly implement the same strategy. A number of SEM experts, for example, predict Google+ Local may soon go this route, given their actions in 2011 and 2013 regarding reviews. To prevent the loss of possibly *months or years* of work, under NO circumstances should Yelp (or any publishers, really) be mentioned explicitly as a place to leave a good review. For more suggestions, check out [Mike Blumenthal’s guide to asking for reviews](#).

Protect yourself and your clients by being proactive!

Soliciting Reviews

Review solicitations can take many forms. As should be obvious from the above, Yelp sees *any* mention of their business in conjunction with the word “reviews” as tantamount to solicitation. While not every publisher is this stringent, businesses and GeoMarketers in the United States must take heed of what the Federal Trade Commission deems “solicitation” with respect to reviews. The most important document you’ll need to read is [this guide to endorsements](#) published by the FTC. It outlines (in black and white) what constitutes endorsement versus solicitation.

For a cautionary tale, be sure to read about [Edmunds.com suing Humankind, a review farm](#) and the subsequent fallout from that case. The primary takeaway is: **buying fake reviews doesn’t end well**. It’s best avoided in the first place.

Know the Guidelines

Below are links to various publishers’ review guidelines. Be sure to familiarize yourself with their policies, as well as revisit these regularly to note any changes. Forewarned is forearmed, and informed decisions are smart decisions.

- [Yelp](#)
- [Google+ Local](#)
- [Yahoo!](#)
- [Citysearch](#)
- [Foursquare](#)
- [YP.com](#)
- [Facebook](#)

Last, remember: ultimately reviews are [inherently ephemeral](#) despite what some may think. As a GeoMarketer, it's your responsibility to bake in contingency plans into your brand strategy for a client.

Responding to Reviews

Responding to online reviews, both positive and negative, can be a good opportunity for business owners to engage with their customers online. This shows customers that the business is listening to them, while the reviews themselves provide legitimate feedback for the business. How you respond to reviews, both positive and negative, is a major component of reputation management. Bear in mind that current and potential customers will read these reviews, so it's important to demonstrate that the business is committed to making sure customers have a great experience.

Respond in a timely manner. Don't wait months to respond to a review – respond within one week of when the review is posted. Ignoring bad reviews doesn't make them disappear, and it can actually send a negative message to those reading about your business online. (Turn on Review Notifications in the Yext Dashboard to get notified when new reviews are posted!)

Don't get defensive. Business owners can sometimes feel upset or angry when they see that someone has written a negative review about their business. Don't hastily or emotionally respond to the review with a rebuttal; rather, take time to think about how to rectify the situation. This is your opportunity as a business owner to show that you care about the customer's experience. Do not reply with a cookie-cutter response. Instead, address the client's concern, take responsibility for the issue, and apologize if necessary. Let the reviewer know how you plan to fix the problem they faced as well as what steps you plan on taking to ensure that this issue does not occur in the future.

Keep it short. This is not the forum to conduct a back and forth argument with the customer about what occurred. Remember to take responsibility for the issue! If necessary, take the conversation offline: reach out to the customer via private message or email, then respond to the review with a message stating that this matter was handled privately with the customer. Provide contact information if the reviewer would like to get in touch with you regarding the matter.

Respond to positive reviews. Thank the customer for their patronage and for taking the time to write a positive review about the business.

SEO for Websites

If Web 2.0 was the advent of the participatory internet, then Web 3.0 is all about the convergence of the analog and the digital words — the meeting of Local, Mobile, and tech. This means GeoMarketers are not at the cutting edge of innovation; rather, you live on the *very bleeding edge*. Ensuring that your clients have a presence that appeals to this emerging era of internet is of paramount importance.

Websites can be tricky! In this section, we'll walk you through what your client's website needs to have — special markdown, formatting, mobile versions, and content you need to ensure they include. We'll also touch on social, but most of that information lives in the next section.

Must-Haves

When designing a website for a client, regardless of if you outsource the designing and building of the site, you've got to be able to articulate what elements are necessary in the site itself. We'll note that some of this gets a little technical — not to worry! For the markup language that makes websites possible, called HTML, you can [reference this Wikipedia page](#) for clarifications on terms. If you're a bit more familiar with HTML and web design, you can reference [W3 Schools](#) as a quick guide. For those fairly savvy with HTML, be sure to look at [the full HTML documentation](#) on W3C.

In this section, we're going to cover elements or pages that a client's website *must* have. These are website design elements that have noted SEO impact, largely because they make information sought by the web crawlers (as well as customers!) more easily discovered.

Avoid Flash

A number of websites from a bygone era rely on [Flash](#) to achieve certain effects and interactive experiences. With the improvements in HTML and CSS over the last decade, Flash has quickly become a relic of the past.

More importantly: information stored in Flash animation ***cannot be crawled by web spiders***. This means that putting the most necessary information for a crawler — namely, a business's NAP information — within a Flash panel renders that information unreadable, potentially tanking your SEO.

Instead, build your website using purely HTML and CSS, with Javascript to add special animations and/or interactive effects to the site. HTML and CSS are fully crawlable by search engines, meaning they can essentially “read” the information contained in those tags more readily than they can read Flash “code”. Crawlers have a limited number of languages they can “read” (much like, say, you or I!) and by presenting your data to them in a medium they understand, your efforts will be rewarded.

Put NAP Info in the Header and Footer

You're going to want to put your client's business NAP information inside the header and footer of your page. If the words “header” and “footer” sound familiar to you, they should! These words come from [page layouts](#), which you have had to wrestle with if you've ever used a word processing program. In a page layout, headers and footers will appear on each page of the document and include data such as page numbers, work title, section titles, copyright/confidential notices, and/or author information.

In the same vein, a web page serves as a single document, with a header, body, and footer. The body of the page will include most of the content — in the case of your client, it could be anything from a pinned map, photo collage, or social feed to a simple presentation of business hours, staff, and services.

The header usually appears as the data in the space above the URL bar — this includes the text that appears if you hover over a tab with your mouse. This information matters because it is *also* the first text that potential customers see in a search engine. Put differently: **the info in the <title> tags of your site become the text of the link in search results**. Choose this text wisely! Titles should run no more than 64 characters at most, and should include any keywords strongly associated with your client’s brand, but only *after* the business name and location. When in doubt, mimic a publisher such as Yelp or Google+ Local — you can see this by hovering over the tab that the site is loaded in. Alternatively, right click on the page, then click “View page source,” and then search on that page for “<title>”. You should see the page title written there.

In the footer, you should repeat your client’s NAP information — and this exact footer should appear on every page of your client’s website. The exception is if they have multiple locations.

Individual Location Landing Pages

If your client has a business with multiple locations (e.g. a laundromat, café, or salon) then each location must have its own landing page, with individualized information: individual social media pages, a pinned map (or, GeoSitemap), NAP information listed and formatted correctly, and the header tags individualized to the location. Here’s an example to illustrate what a location landing page can look like:

[image removed]

Use Meta Tags and SCHEMA Markdown

While we’ve mentioned using some markdown and HTML, but there’s one other markdown language you need to know about: SCHEMA. Schema allows you to format microdata with tags that webmasters can use to markup their pages in ways recognized by major search providers.

This meta tag language is well documented on Schema.org. If you want your clients’ NAP information written in as attractive a way as possible for a web crawler, *you must use this convention*. Meta tags give search engine crawlers a better understanding of the *context* of website content. For example, many cities have a Euclid Ave or Street — but it isn’t always labeled. For a crawler, it can’t discern if Euclid refers to an address or to [the Greek mathematician](#) without further context — context *you can provide* using meta tags.

By using meta tags correctly, you can make it easier for crawlers to recognize the client’s site content for what it is intended to represent, which can have a significant impact on your search rank.

A Mobile-Friendly Website

As mobile devices become increasingly ubiquitous, GeoMarketers must plan for users to discover their clients via smartphone or tablet. This means having websites and materials presented in a way that’s friendly for smaller screens — less text (or at least larger text) along with more images and other rich media. This also means the site automatically detects screen size and adapts to new dimensions.

When preparing content, make sure that you're formatting it with an eye for mobile adaptation. Use page layout structures such as [heading tags](#) (i.e. <h1>, <h2>, etc.) and be sure to include blockquotes and to differentiate these spaces visually from the main body text. Last, consider presenting information using HTML5 elements rather than using Flash or basic CSS. Be sure to include NAP meta-tags in the mobile-friendly HTML as well.

Optional Inclusions

There's a number of other things you can include on a website that aren't necessarily *musts* so much as *strongly recommended* inclusions. We've listed these below:

- **Social icons/feeds** — Choosing to include social feeds on your client's website isn't necessary, but could have impact especially for human visitors, a.k.a. potential customers!
- **Enhanced content lists** — Including menus, product lists, staff bios, and other lists that give visitors a better sense of who your client is and what they do. Yext makes it easier than ever to embed content lists on your site; if you use a site that's powered by WordPress, Yext allows you to embed the content lists in a web crawlable way using the Yext plugin.
- **Rich media galleries** — Highlighting photographs and creating short, viral-worthy videos around your clients' products or services, or to bring attention to loyal customers is always a great idea. It earns your client a cult following, and if done correctly, can feel organic and genuine. Using web apps to direct extant conversation about your client's business isn't a new idea (this is community management at a brand level) but it doesn't always have to occur at scale. Leveraging these techniques for small business could real serious rewards in positive press and exposure for a relatively small/inexpensive amount of work.

For more about what GeoMarketers need to know about local-oriented website, see [How Partners Sell Yext: Part Two — SEO Solutions](#).

Tech Specs

We're about to dive into the nitty gritty technical side of websites here a little bit. Roll up your sleeves and grab your keyboards — let's talk about tech specs for a website.

Search Engine Indexing

As you've probably been able to gather by now, sites that aren't indexed don't get visited. Check to see if your client's site is being indexed fully by typing the following into any major search engine:

site:your-domain

If you see most of your client's pages listed in this search, excellent! If not, you may have some work ahead of you yet. If you use WordPress, the [Yoast WordPress SEO plugin](#) is well-reviewed and fairly lightweight.

Be sure to note what the links themselves are titled, and what the descriptions below these links read; if you have errors in your title or meta tags, you'll be able to better to diagnose errors from this SERP than by manually combing through page after page.

Search Engine Crawling

Of course, indexing requires a page be crawled, first! If you want to check if a site has been crawled, simply enter the following text string into your search engine of choice:

cache:your-domain.in

Then, click "Text-only version" in the top right-hand corner. You'll then be able to get a glimpse of what a crawler bot "sees" when it sifts through a site. Ensure that any important information (NAP, keywords, etc.) are represented in the text-only versions.

CNAME Records

If you want to build a site for a client using freely available tools such as Blogger, WordPress.com, or Google Sites, but you want to still use a custom URL, then you'll want to map your site to your domain. (Or, in web parlance, **domain mapping**.) In order to do this, you're going to have to edit something called a [DNS registry](#), specifically the CNAME record. Most purveyors of domains (e.g. GoDaddy, Name.com, and/or eNom) have a dashboard that allow you to manage the DNS records for a domain.

Domain mapping is actually fairly common, especially for artists and musicians, who often host their portfolios on sites like Tumblr or Medium. Google has a [comprehensive, step-by-step walk-through](#) of how to change the CNAME record for a Google Site. Note that a non-Google site would require the CNAME destination resolve to a different URL. **Check in your host site's FAQ for their destination information.** Every site is different. Here are the most common ones:

- Google: ghs.googlehosted.com
- Tumblr: domains.tumblr.com (See also: [Using a custom domain name](#).)
- Blogger: ghs.google.com (See also: [How do I use a custom domain name for my blog?](#))
- WordPress.com: See this article about domains. [Domains](#).

It may be easier to use a subdomain rather than mapping the entire site — consider this option with caution. For businesses with multiple locations, this could actually be the better option. However, for a single location business, hosting other parts of the site elsewhere may not be feasible. It's up to you as the GeoMarketer to make the right call. Note that you're going to be balancing tech savvy against time management. The biggest tradeoff is, ultimately, control.

Social

If blogging was the harbinger of Web 2.0, then social media reflects the culmination of this era of internet. In no other space is the creative force more fully in the hands of the consumer. The content

that is valuable — the content that matters — is no longer created by an elite cadre of gatekeepers, tastemakers, and shotcallers. Instead, the EveryUser became the creator, and his/her very presence on a site became the true point of value.

Social is how the current generation of internet users connects, whether it's to each other or to brands and local businesses. Social is how a GeoMarketer leverages Local and Mobile to the fullest extent. If you're not using social media — good, bad, or indifferent — then you're leaving money on the table.

In the following sections, we'll talk about why social matters, best practices when diving into the social marketing space, and what sorts of messages to tailor to each platform.

Why Bother?

The most common question asked of a GeoMarketer by a business owner is *Why should I bother with social media?* Or, least, it may seem that way! But social media is proving to be an increasingly powerful force in the local marketing space: 40% of all adults with a cell phone use social media on their smartphones. Businesses that don't leverage social well are leaving money on the table.

Businesses can use social media to boost word of mouth about their business. Having a Facebook site linked to a Local-Area Network (e.g. a chamber of commerce or a business network) can boost visibility while improving engagement with current and potential customers. Running an online-only sale, for example, could boost a client's online presence without unduly sacrificing margins. According to Pew Research, over 70% of all U.S. adults have or use Facebook regularly.

In turn, Twitter seems to be growing in both popularity and relative impact: in September 2013, some 18% of all adults used Twitter, with Instagram close behind at 17%. Both services have one basic idea at their core: *share*. And not just share, but share EVERYTHING. To that end, if your client's business is crafty, if your client's business contains a visual component, or if your client's business is really owning a "cool and hip" aesthetic, then you as a GeoMarketer wouldn't be doing your job if you weren't handling their social media.

While the likes of Taco Bell and Waterstone's Books are definitely nailing their social media strategy, more local businesses like [Gorilla Coffee](#), [Knitty City](#), and [Shake Shack](#) are using social media to stay connected to their audience and maintain an engaged connection to their customer base — driving value and reaching out meaningfully to potential customers.

(This article uses statistics from this [Pew Research Social Networking Fact Sheet](#).)

Best Practices

When it comes to social media, best practice guides are dime a dozen. Instead of offering a myriad number of rules, we're going to give you three guiding principles in how you should approach your social media marketing strategy. These guidelines are adapted from various talks given at Social Media Week NYC 2014.

Have a brand voice. — More than just having something to say, make sure everyone who is handling social media for your client is using a voice, tone, and integrating media that is true to the client's own voice. For example, if your client runs a knitting shop mostly frequented by young men discharged from the military, then sharing videos about interesting sock patterns, chunky knit projects, and photos of all-male knitting nights dating back to the 1940s and 50s may be more interesting to them than shawls or baby booties — but ask your client if that's true before developing a strategy! It may well be that there's demand for both. The way the brand speaks to its followers influences who goes into the shop, how regulars react to the new marketing presence, and what kinds of people discover and patron the establishment. Failing to do your due diligence as a GeoMarketer could cost your client dearly.

Be authentic. — We're quickly coming up on the emergence of a generation with serious spending power and zero recollection of a time before internet. On the one hand, this presents an enormous opportunity of tech-savvy, innovation-appreciate consumers. On the other hand, a generation raised surfing Reddit and watching clips of The Daily Show on Hulu has bred a certain level of cynicism. Marketers have learned that any sort of falseness — whether in tone or intent — is seized upon and the offending entity publicly shamed. The tech-savvy generation has no patience or appreciation for anything it deems "fake," or, worse, manipulative. Given this, as a GeoMarketer, your messaging must always be reflective of the client's true nature. If you veer from what their business actually is, and who the team working there is, you will find yourself dealing with a special kind of backlash.

Dare to experiment. — Even with the above two, doing something a little surprising, a little shocking, a little different from the norm can pay off in exciting ways. Breaking one's image to show a different side of the brand (perhaps the brand tends to be rather staid but then pulls out some goofy photos or silly memes from time to time) can be just as effective as being witty consistently. Or, alternatively, an otherwise seemingly sophomoric image can take a moment to insert some gravitas into their social presence, say by bringing attention to a local cause or by highlighting a struggle an employee or valued customer has overcome. Small moments like these, which deviate from the usual "schtick" can humanize a brand and make it more empathetic to its audience. GeoMarketers who discover the right balance can deliver incredible value to not just their clients but also to their clients' customers.

For more about social media best practices, check out these resources:

- [50 Social Media Best Practices](#) (Salesforce)
- [Social Media Marketing Best Practices](#) (ExactTarget)
- [The Constant Contact Blog](#) (Constant Contact)

Platforms by Purpose

Each social platform is different, with tools and features and audiences clamoring for different things. It's a crowded field, and while the biggest players are also the more established ones, there's always room for more. In this article, we'll go over how you can leverage Facebook, Foursquare, and Google+ well, and what you should be doing to connect to your client's audience on each.

Facebook

If Google is the 800-pound red gorilla in the room with respect to search, then Facebook is, by all indicators, the blue version of that behemoth in the Social Media lounge. But while a lot of SMBs (or their local marketing agencies) keep a Facebook for customer acquisition — despite [mounting evidence that's not a high-ROI activity](#). Many experts, instead, suggest leveraging Facebook for its most natural use case: community management.

Use Facebook to engage your audience and empower them to act as brand advocates — share photographs (both yours and theirs), ask them questions, partner with local juggernauts, and generally curate the media on the page to not only reflect your client's personality, but also the best the brand can offer.

Ultimately, your client *may* acquire a customer or two — but more importantly, they'll have locked in a core customer base who will go out and spread the word of mouth to their social networks, either through digital or analog sharing!

Foursquare

Foursquare is often hailed as the harbinger of Web 3.0. Its mix of mobile, social, and inherently local goals make it a prime candidate for such declarations. Foursquare has a robust database of locations spanning countries all over the world. With its binary rating system (like or dislike) and its Tweet-sized reviews, Foursquare reflects the immediate *now* in a way few other social networks can really claim to.

Leveraging Foursquare for business can be tricky. While the company [has provided some case studies](#), Yext's integration makes populating and managing your client's Foursquare business page easier than ever. Plus, you can share content and update your client's specials instantly in Yext. Use Foursquare to turn "butterfly" customers (that is, ephemeral customers) into loyalists by offering specials, loyalty programs, rewards, and other deals.

Last, Foursquare powers Instagram and Pinterest's location data. If your target client is active on those networks, a Foursquare presence is a must!

Google+

It's no secret Google+ Local is the new kid on the block. Unlike the '90s era music sensation, however, their impact is far more easily forecast. Since Google+ Local is a primary cornerstone of the most recent Google Maps and Google Search updates, it's imperative that any GeoMarketer worth their salt understand how to use it better. First and foremost, you've got to know [the difference between the two](#).

An active Google+ Local page is an excellent signal to Google's own algorithm about the health of your client's business. However, recognize that Google+ is a social network still in development. That said, the work you put in on your client's behalf now could very well pay off far later on down the road.

For example, Google+ makes it very easy to share rich media content — photographs and videos enjoy a significant amount of screen real estate, and the browsing experience for these media items is a pleasant hybrid of Pinterest and Tumblr. Note also that, if you do this right, this same rich media will be

attached to your client's business in search. Photos will show up when users search for the business both in Google as well as on Google Maps. That's quite an upside!

Furthermore, Google+ makes broadcasting to an audience much more efficient through the use of technologies like Google Hangouts. You can organize a round table, a Q&A, or even just a digital meet-up for your client. The possibilities are endless — clients who run a bakery could host a “cooking class” in real time; craftspeople could host a virtual sewing circle; indie bookstores could do digital book club; nail salons could host a workshop on keeping a manicure from chipping for longer; and so on. There's a huge amount of unexplored potential. If you're a GeoMarketer with the time and creativity, exploring Google+ as an emerging opportunity is a must.