

Think Globally, Market Locally

As the search engines shift their focus to local and mobile, marketing opportunities open up for AV integrators. by Don Kreski

THERE'S A CRUCIAL CHANGE under way in search engine marketing. As more people shift their Internet browsing to smart phones and tablets, Google and Bing have shifted their strategies as well, emphasizing local businesses on their results pages. The change offers great opportunities for integrators, given that our industry emphasizes face-to-face relationships managed from local offices.

Google, seeing the trend, made a change in the fall of 2010 designed to improve the search results mobile users see. "If they sense that a search might have local intent," explains Tim Grant, director of search and social media strategy at Gamma Partners in Chicago, "they reserve a portion of the results page for local business listings." Bing quickly followed Google's lead and both engines apply their localized results to searches launched from a PC as well as a mobile device.

Predicting whether a key phrase has "local intent" in the search engines' eyes can be a little tough, but an easy way to tell is to do some searches in Google with your location set to two different cities.

To do that, I'd suggest opening Google in your favorite browser and trying a search. Then open a different browser and repeat the search, but this time click "change location" in the left-hand column of the results page to a different city. I'm finding, as I write this article, that I'm getting identical organic results for "AV integrator" in my two cities but completely different results for "AV installation." If I search for "home theater" I see different organic results and also local results coming from Google Places, with seven home theater suppliers listed for each city and pinned to a local map.



Clearly, localized results can have an important impact, although it will vary with the key term. There are several strategies that an integrator can utilize to make this trend work to their advantage.

Register with Google, Bing

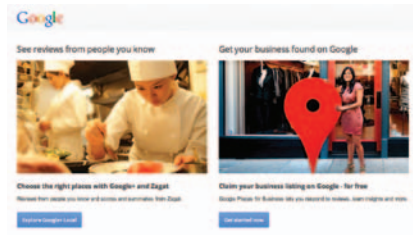
The first step in a local search campaign is to "claim your business" on Google.com/places and on the Bing Business Portal. When you register, you can list the addresses and phone numbers of your offices, provide a description of your business, link to your website and connect your site to various categories within the search index. You can also upload your logo, your business hours and photos of your offices and projects; if you do, they

will appear in your listing in the local search section of Google or Bing.

It's important to note that Google and Bing will each try to verify your business and its locations with other websites such as InfoUSA, Yelp, Google Plus, Yahoo! Local, and Yellowpages.com, so you want to register your business on these sites as well. "It's very important that these listings be consistent with one another," Grant notes, "so we suggest that you list your business by the name it was incorporated under, that your address and phone always match exactly and that you use a phone belonging to that address, rather than an 800 number or a cell phone."

If Google or Bing finds consistency problems, they will drop your listing from their local search indexes. For this reason, it's a usually a waste of time to try to register your sales reps' home addresses as office locations when the reps work out of their homes.

"Some of our customers are reluctant to register on Google Places, Yelp or other sites that offer online reviews," he adds. "They think that if they don't register, consumers can't post negative comments. That's not the case. Consumers



Register your business and provide information to help gain local search hits.

can always post comments, but by registering your business, you generally have the opportunity to publically respond to these comments, provide more accurate and detailed information about the business and keep it from potentially being registered by a competitor.”

Building Geography into Content

The next step in your campaign is to build geographic terms into the pages of your website. “We suggest that you include your company name, main address and phone number on every page of your site, as well as terms that define the areas you serve,” Grant explains. This step can help potential clients understand that you serve their area as well as help the search engines list you appropriately.

This is especially true because professional services companies don’t really

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fit the localization model. For example, I have a good client in the far northwest suburbs of Chicago that does business downtown. Both Google and Bing ask companies to define the areas they do business in, and we included Chicago for this client. But the reality is that they will give preference to a Chicago-based company in localized results.

To help overcome that issue, we’ve included the term “Chicago” on every page of their site and included “Chicago” in our title and meta-description tags, and that does seem to help with organic results. If someone refines his search for an integrator to “AV integrator Chicago,” we pop up on the first page.

It can be a good idea to create a separate “contact us” page for each of your company’s offices or showrooms. That can help the search engines verify

that you do have individual locations, but even more importantly, take potential customers directly to your local office when they find you in local search.

Of course, the trend toward mobile Internet access is creating a major problem for integrators with websites that don’t look good when viewed on a 4-inch diagonal screen. Grant argues that, at minimum, every business should add a home

page and contact page that will load when accessed by a mobile device, and those considering a major site upgrade should consider a technology that serves mobile as well as PC users. **CI**

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