Conducting a Local SEO Audit

Local SEO is the process of optimizing your website for location-based searches. Millions of people conduct these searches daily on mobile devices (like smartphones and tablets) as well as desktop computers.

Whether you're just getting started with local SEO or beefing up your current efforts, these tips will help you conduct a local SEO audit. They'll also help you develop a deeper understanding of your rankings, and provide valuable insight as you evaluate the tools available to enhance your work.

Tip One: Survey the Local Landscape

Search for your company or organization on Google, Bing, and Yahoo using a desktop and mobile device. (Remember: clearing your history, cache and cookies before beginning means more accurate results.)

Besides looking for your company/organization by name, search for the location-based keywords you want to rank for. If you're a Milwaukee widget manufacturer, for example, you might search "Milwaukee general contractors," "Milwaukee contractors" and "contractors Milwaukee."

Record your findings for each query. Is the information correct? What's missing? Does a map with your location appear in the results? Where do your competitors rank? Answering these questions will help you as you move forward.
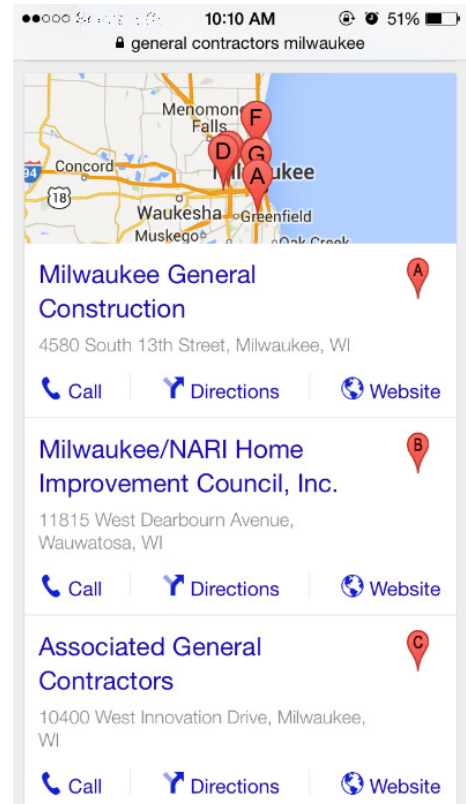
Tip Two: Use a (Free) Tool to Dig Deeper

There are many local SEO tools. However, Moz Local is a robust free tool that finds errors in directory entries and offers tips for improvement. Add another layer to your own research and uncover things you might have missed.

Tip Three: Tackle Your Shortcomings

After you've finished your research, start working to improve your rankings. To do this, you can:

- Use automated software and pay a monthly fee
- Fix the issues yourself
- Hire a trusted SEO firm

Below is a chart you can use to evaluate each option.

Tool	How it Works	Price	Update Time	Setup	Benefits	Drawbacks
Moz Local (Paid version)	Your data is submitted to five aggregators that feed it to online directories.	$84/year	It can take up to 8 weeks for new info to appear in search results.	Less than 30 minutes*	- Simple to use - Easily add new locations - Aggregators submit information to lots of sites - Cost-efficient	- You don't know exactly which directories your info is being submitted to - The information you give Moz has to meet their standards (i.e. descriptions must be 250 words) - If you cancel, your directory entries may change - No on page recommendation - No custom research
Yext	Yext submits your data directly to 50+ online directories and locks it, preventing changes	$17 - $83 a month	Real time updates	Less than 30 minutes	- Manage 50+ directories using one dashboard - Can pay for promoted listings, similar to Google ads	- You can't select directories to submit info to; Yext has its own list. - If you cancel, your listings may change and promoted entries end immediately - No on page recommendations - No custom research
Brightlocal	BrightLocal submits data directly to directories for you	$100 - $150 (one - time)	70% go live within 7 weeks	Less than 30 minutes	- You choose the directories to submit your info to - You own the directory entries so they're unlikely to change if you cancel	- You info is not submitted to any aggregators - No guarantee the listings will go live - No on page recommendations - No custom research

Tool	How it Works	Price	Update Time	Setup	Benefits	Drawbacks
Do it Yourself (DIY)	Research unique local directories and make on-page recommendations	Free	Unknown - depends on your efforts	10+ hours	- You control the info - No cost	- No expert support - No on page recommendations - No custom research that may benefit your company
SEO Firm	Research unique local directories and make on-page recommendations	Varies	On page recommendations are real time. Directories updated within 2 months	Varies - usually one kickoff meeting	- Custom research to find directories that benefit you - On page SEO recommendations to enhance directory entries - Submit data to aggregators and directories - You own your information - You know where your data is going	-Not all directory entries are updated in real time

Moz Local requires that you submit your data to them in a CSV file with fields they determine. This time estimate does not include time for putting your data into that spreadsheet.

** Remember to check out our local SEO blog entry for on-page tips.

Tip Four: Review Your Reviews

Look for reviews of your company/business on sites like Yelp and Foursquare as well as social media. (Another tip: If you don't have social media profiles or entries on Yelp or Foursquare, create or claim them so no one else does.)

If you do have reviews on any of sites, whether they're negative or positive, be sure to respond. This is an important part of digital customer service.

Moving forward, check your profiles frequently so you can stay on top of reviews.

There are solutions that will monitor reviews for you. If you're interested in using one, the chart on the next page can help inform your decision.

★★★★★ tojopa, 10/16/2008

ethics, talent, fair, diligent, cutting edge, real, Titan CMS,
Northwoods provides stellar custom web development serives, Titan CMS, SEO, Creative Design services to all markets and industries.\r \r A highly ethical and intelligent group of 50 dedicated engineers,project managers and business analysts wrap your needs into solvable, fixed cost plans, and more than expected high quality results!\r \r Websites, Portals, web based applications, creative design services. A one-stop -hop!

Like this review? Yes | Flag Abuse

Provided by Citysearch

Tool	How it Works	Price	Benefits	Drawbacks
Review Trackers	Scans the web and sends an email anytime you have a new review	$29+ a month	- Connects with Hootsuite (for social media) - Provides analytics about site visitors - Allows you to request reviews from users - Can create customer feedback landing pages	-No advice on how to respond to negative reviews -Social reviews may be missed
Chatmeter	Scans the web and emails you anytime you have a new review (including on social sites) and provides information about your competitors	Varies (Contact for custom quote)	- Robust tracking features - Provides competitors' data - All data managed in one dashboard	- Lots of features you may not want to need - Most useful for companies with storefronts, like auto shops, restaurants and retail - No advice on responding to negative reviews
Do It Yourself (DIY)	Monitor Reviews Yourself	Free	- Low-cost	- You may miss reviews -No advice on responding to negative reviews - Takes up a lot of time
SEO Firm	Hire an outside SEO or digital marketing firm to monitor (and possibly respond) to your reviews	Varies	- Reviews won't be missed - Will use best practices to respond to reviews - Can provide tips on increasing positive reviews organically and disputing false reviews - You determine how often you get updates	- May be a higher initial investment

Tip Six: Rinse and Repeat

The work doesn't end after you've optimized your site for local search. Google, Bing and Yahoo continually tweak their software. Since even a small adjustment could impact your local SEO, regular monitoring will allow you to stay on top of any changes.

If your business/organization expands, it's important to repeat the process for new locations.

Remember, like traditional SEO, local SEO is a marathon, not a sprint. However, taking the steps to enhance your site for local search can improve rankings over time.

Conclusion

As mobile devices and geolocation technology continue to increase, local SEO will become increasingly important for all businesses, from restaurants to manufacturers.

Conducting a local SEO audit today will help you identify shortcomings in your SEO strategy so that you can work on boosting rankings and getting a leg up on your competitors.
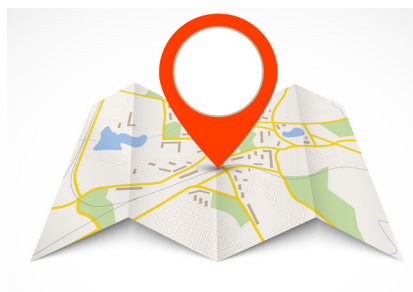
Can we help you? Northwoods performs local SEO consultation and monitoring services for companies around the country. Contact us for a conversation.

ABOUT NORTHWOODS

Northwoods provides digital marketing services, web design and development, consultation, custom software development, and enterprise content management (CMS) design and implementation expertise to companies nationwide. Northwoods has built a reputation as a thought leader in web design through our award winning work, our commitment to mastery of the latest technologies, and our passion for ongoing education for our team, our clients, and the business community.

NORTHWOODS   855-877-3115

414-914-9100 | rick@northwoodsoft.com | northwoodsoft.com |