Impacting Local SEO Rankings with Local Business Listing Management

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MARKETING

Executive Summary:

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, sales in 2012 from eCommerce were $186 billion, and sales at physical stores in the U.S. totaled $4.3 trillion.*

This disparity indicates an enormous upsell opportunity for increased eCommerce sales. However, for brick and mortar stores to capture a larger piece of the total sales pie, Local SEO automation is required to manage the increasingly competitive and complex marketplace for promoting local services through search. Now more than ever, managing local business listings across search engines, Internet directories and social networks can influence local search rankings on Google, Yahoo and Bing. In fact, Google reported that 20 percent of the 4 billion queries in May 2013 were related to local searches, and 40-50 percent of mobile queries had local intent.

As a growing number of local networks and directories appear in the local search ecosystem, multi-location businesses and big brands are challenged to accurately optimize and distribute their business listing information. It is vital to local businesses and national brands alike to have placement not just in the search engines, but to understand how each data aggregator can enhance distribution efforts and to embrace social marketing opportunities. To assist with automating these challenges, there are a number of best practices, analytics and automation tools available to marketers that will be described in this report. The report stems from a June 27, 2013 Digital Marketing Depot (DMD) webinar featuring:

Greg Sterling, Founder of Sterling Market Intelligence
Mike Shannon, CTO and Co-Founder at Best Rank, Inc.
Bill Connard, Vice President of Local Search Solutions at Rio SEO

Contents:

Optimizing local business listings

Various online channels, search engines and mobile opportunities have become viable, offering consumers more ways than ever to find the local products and services they are seeking.

"Findability" is now the answer to any multi-location national brand or small business with physical locations. The majority of online consumers use the Internet during the purchase process, even when buying locally. Depending on the category, consumers may actually visit three to seven sites during the decision process. Local content and localized ads are seen as more relevant and engaging by shoppers seeking to buy locally. In order for your business to be easily discovered, its listing information must be up to date and accurate.

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Bing/Google/Yahoo on local search success

Businesses often make the mistake of considering only optimizing for Google+ Local when updating local business listings. Although 66.7 percent of searches occur on Google, 17.4 percent happen on Bing and 11.9 percent occur on Yahoo.* Marketers who only consider Google are automatically missing almost 30 percent of searches. In addition, Google actually restricts the most information through bulk listing feeds, as compared with other engines that do not do this. Google's listing offering has limited enhanced data, such as categorization. It favors local pages versus titles; most traffic is driven to organic listings and local maps.

Bing's new local bulk upload tool, which was launched in April 2013 for its Bing Places for Business, offers social integration and much more enhanced data than Google+ Pages.

Bing local advantages:

Marketers should also consider the positive impact of cross-channel results between the search engines. For example, Yahoo listings rank and are displayed to consumers in both Google and Bing listings. These cross-channel results offer additional search engine results page (SERP) real estate that should be considered and measured within a local campaign.

Managing listings with the data aggregators

Once the initial work for an effective search engine listing strategy has begun, businesses should seek out the services of data aggregators to continue their local listing improvements. Businesses comfortable with their position on the SERP's can still improve local results by managing listings with data aggregators. How? Google often ranks listings from data aggregators higher than a local listing submitted directly to the engine. Google considers data aggregators to be the more "trusted" source of business information for page rank. The main aggregators include:

- Acxiom
- Neustar Localeze
- Infogroup Express Update

As noted in the June 27, 2013 Digital Marketing Depot webcast by Bill Connard, Vice President of Local Search Solutions at Rio SEO:

Acxiom has a very impressive and highly valuable distribution network. The firm's relationship with Apple Maps has made it a key player in the system. Acxiom's network actually feeds search results to a wide variety of sources, such as Internet Yellow Pages, Zagat, Urban Mapping, Superpages and Yelp, as well as directly to Google, Bing and Yahoo.

Infogroup's Express Update USA is one of the oldest aggregators and currently the most antiquated data collection system available, but that's soon to change. Infogroup plans to announce a new API that will allow many more data fields. Currently formatting is difficult, but not impossible. Express Update provides information to search engines, directories and in-car navigation systems for vehicles including Honda, Lexus and Jaguar.

Neustar Localeze is by far the easiest platform to format and deliver bulk feeds. It offers an API option that makes it very easy to update data and accept real-time data. Neustar Localeze has the fastest platform with more than 100 partners, including Mapquest, Superpages, Walk Score, Nokia and Twitter.

Maintaining updated information has become a challenge for national multi-location businesses, as well as for smaller businesses. Working with the aforementioned data aggregators can improve the relevancy and sustain the elevated accuracy of critical business information. Businesses can feed local listing information or customer database information into the system and then have it automatically distribute in an accurate manner to all of the various local listing providers.

The costs of working with data aggregators are minimal compared to the benefits of being distributed in hundreds of online, mobile and even in-car channels. Aggregators are ranked according to levels of trust. A brand can actually see its accurate data given lower priority on the search engines and directories than inaccurate data being displayed by an aggregator.

"In my experience, it can take from 15 to 20 hours *per location* to submit and optimize all business data across these channels," said Rio SEO's Bill Connard. "Local SEO automation is vital to efficiency and effectiveness. Marketers should look for an automation tool that allows for bulk feeds across channels through one-click, providing unlimited data mapping and offering a single managed system to allow for scalability across channels."

Case Study: Best Rank, a San Diego-based digital and search marketing agency, works with Advance Auto Parts and American Signature Furniture. By utilizing the Rio SEO local platform, Best Rank was able to scale technology quickly, format all of the location-based data in a highly scalable manner across all of the search engines, grow the agency's services, save time, and create high growth results for its clients.

Local business data across social engines

With more than 1 billion consumers utilizing Facebook, Foursquare and Yelp, local listings are becoming more socially-driven than ever. These social media channels offer more active and direct results, and social results are becoming increasingly important in search rankings across the engines.
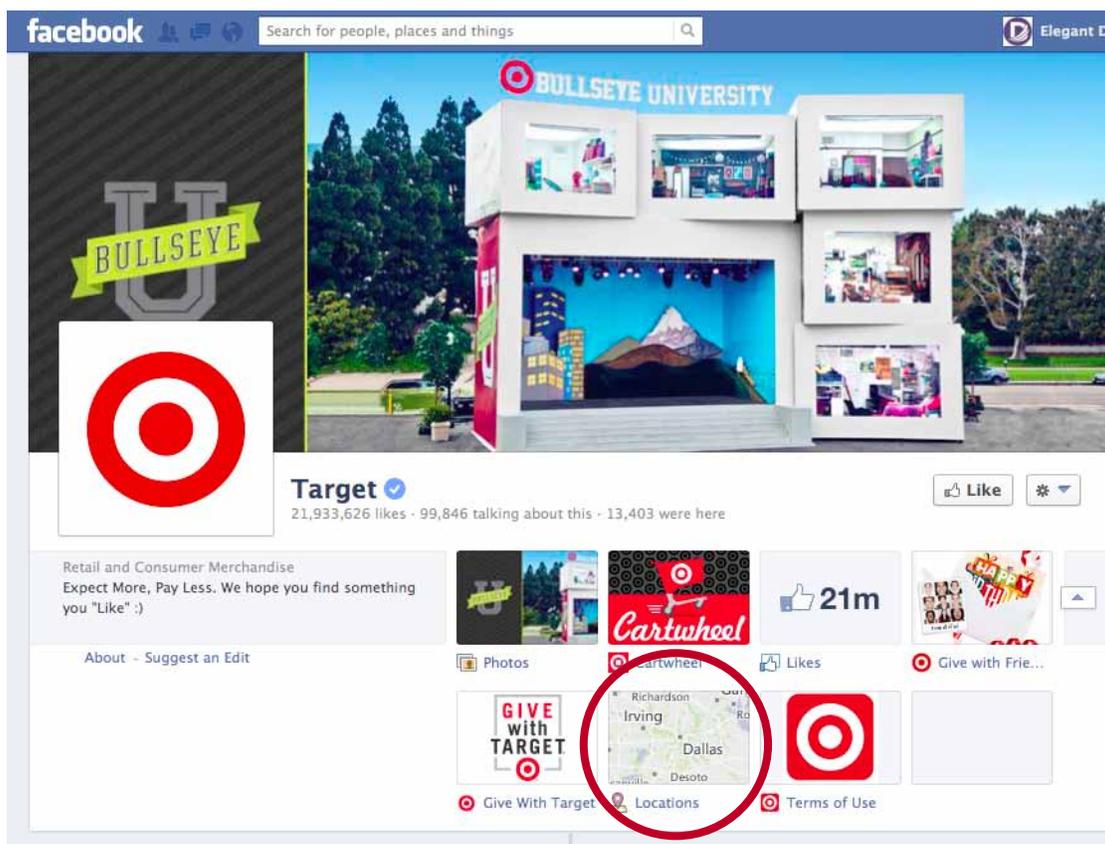
Google+

Marketers can manage Google+ local listings by way of their Google Map listings, as these pages are linked. However, there are ways to optimize exposure within Google+. Rich snippets into search, including promotions, operating hours and images, can gain additional Google+ rankings for a business, and a single bulk feed allows for more streamlined optimization.

Facebook

Facebook now offers bulk feeds through brand and location-specific Facebook pages. There are now more than 1 billion extremely active and engaged monthly Facebook users and 165 million mobile users. Facebook's local search capabilities should be on the top of companies' priority lists. Facebook has what is called a "parent-child" relationship, in which a brand can claim or create local listings.

For example, notice the "locations" section of Target's Facebook page, which displays the locations closest to where the user is logged on:

Yelp

Any Google user will notice that Yelp demands a great deal of real estate in the search results. In fact, many times a Yelp listing will supersede a brand listing because of page authority. The social network offers bulk upload and is used by 100 million users, all looking for local businesses. Yelp can be paid directly or can be accessed via the aforementioned data aggregators.

Foursquare

Foursquare is a highly engaged platform, with users checking in and commenting on the venues and businesses they visit. Foursquare accepts information via bulk feeds, including locations, hours of operations, and more.

Conclusions and Insights:

With an understanding of the opportunities available through search, data aggregators and social channels, both mom-and-pop stores and multi-location retailers and enterprise brands alike should step back to look at their own customer consideration and purchase paths.

Beyond covering the search engines, it is also important to tap into the abundant resources and recipients of data aggregator information. In order to keep this process manageable, look to automation tools that offer bulk upload and single-click updates across the multitude of local listings channels.

Take your customer behavior into consideration when focusing on social marketing channels.

For example, if a salon knows that clients are looking to Google for hairdresser recommendations, it could offer a discount in exchange for a current client placing a positive review on its Google+ page.

Or once a carpet cleaner realizes that Yelp ratings are driving incremental business, it should incorporate a request for ratings onto its leave-behind materials at a customer's home.

For the national brands with multiple locations, take advantage of the parent-child relationships on Facebook to both promote brands in a holistic manner, and to provide mobile-ready and accurate local store information.

By planting seeds across the search engines and data aggregator networks, and in fact encouraging and rewarding customers for sowing those seeds in social channels, local listings can go from an "I need to get around to that" initiative to a top priority in driving business success. ■

*U.S. Labor Department, U.S. Census Bureau, SMI Calculations (2011-2012)
*comScore PC U.S. Search Market Share Data

About Rio SEO

Rio SEO provides best-of-breed software automation and analytic solutions for earned and owned digital media programs, specifically for enterprise search, local SEO, mobile search, social media and content marketing.

Based in San Diego, Rio SEO is among the largest independent providers of SaaS-based SEO automation solutions and patented reporting tools. Rio SEO offers application modules for organic search, local SEO, mobile search and social media, including software tools for content marketing, campaign activation, auditing, reporting, change tracking, keyword competitive analysis, mobile site optimization, SEO execution, and automated local SEO. Rio SEO customers include brand marketers, retailers, and digital agencies. More information about Rio SEO is available at www.RioSEO.com.

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Digital Marketing Depot is the premiere resource center for digital marketing strategies and tactics, providing whitepapers, research reports, and webinars for digital marketers and advertisers.

Digital Marketing Depot is a division of Third Door Media, Inc. Third Door Media's mission is to empower interactive and search marketing professionals by providing trusted content and community services they need to be successful.

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