



Personalized Local Content: Frightful or Insightful?

A Marketing Land Whitepaper

Marketing **Land**[™]



Personalized Local Content: Frightful or Insightful?

Taking advantage of local marketing is—and should be—top of mind for all marketers. Consumers increasingly search online for local products and services, and continue to purchase at brick and mortar stores. (Online retail sales, while growing, represent only 8.4% of all retail, according to Q3 2016 US Census statistics.) For marketers, it's important to effectively deliver personalized local content to consumers, to build long-lasting and profitable relationships.

This whitepaper explores how brands can engage local consumers with personalized, relevant and meaningful website content.

Note: This whitepaper is based on a webcast from Digital Marketing Depot entitled *Personalized Local Content: Frightful or Insightful*. Thanks to the original contributors: Mary Bowling, Co-founder, Ignitor Digital; Brandon Fleming, SEO/SEM Marketing Manager, Protection 1/ADP; and Cynthia Sener, VP of Operations and Product, Rio SEO.

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Introduction

A search engine is only as good as the results it provides searchers, and if it doesn't deliver relevant, timely content, searchers inevitably look elsewhere. That's why it's essential to optimize content for both searchers and search engines, both of whom crave high quality, topical content.

It's a great challenge for national brands with multiple local operations to deliver an experience that is targeted, personalized and relevant at the local level.

The evolution of local and the introduction of localization

Google always intended for local search to enable searchers to discover what is around them. Googlers talk about it as "modeling the real world," and note that the search algorithm moves from global results to localized results when it believes it's appropriate. In short, Google wants to show searchers the businesses that are most popular, most liked and most prominent within their own local areas.

Google's local algorithms can define searches down to the neighborhood level, in order to show searchers just that—the most prominent businesses within an area. Local businesses must provide Google the information it needs to determine whether that business location is the relevant answer to any given local search query. One of the best ways businesses can accomplish this is by localizing the content on their websites.

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The aim of localization is to give a product the look and feel of having been created specifically for a target market, no matter their language, culture or location. With that in mind, business owners need to think about what searchers generally want to know about a local business. Specifically, what do they want to know about a business like yours, in your location? What information is most useful for them?

What searchers want – and need

What searchers want and need is simple: phone, address, areas served, directions, map locations and proximity. Searchers are also interested in knowing what people think about your company, as well as what their experiences have been with your company. These opinions appear in search results in the form of reviews and ratings stars. However, it's also useful for searchers if they can see honest opinions on a company's own website.

Many searchers also want more visibility into the business: the street view, inside, and the services and products. It's important to provide that type of information, as well as information related to the experience they can expect to have at the business.

Searchers want to evaluate a business for its trustworthiness. This includes information about experience, licenses, education/training, community/karma, guarantees/warranties, and professional accreditations.

Some searchers are looking for ways to save money, so they're keeping their eyes open for sales, discounts, coupons, promo codes, alerts, daily deals and loyalty programs.

Google strives to provide the best answers to all of these different types of queries. First, companies need to provide these details on their websites and in their listings so that Google can provide those answers to searchers in the search results.

What's more, Google considers expertise, authority and trustworthiness when determining site quality, just as human searchers do. Google has higher expectations for bigger brands, expecting those brands to offer an optimal search experience, and continues to raise the bar on content quality. Businesses that want to remain relevant to their local customers must focus on presenting that quality, personalized content.

Search engines look for strong store locators

Enterprise companies and their websites have some natural advantages over small local business websites; their websites are typically larger, with good potential ranking power. Enterprise companies also employ professional web developers and dedicated marketers who have the luxury of working with larger budgets than smaller, local companies. They have more linking opportunities, which helps with ranking.

But none of these advantages matter if an enterprise company’s store locator isn’t the best it can be.

Optimizing the store locator requires thinking like both a searcher and a search engine. For example, a store locator might require the site visitor to enter a city or zip code, after which the site would return a location. But these results are often dynamic and not useful to search engines. A drilled down map is good for searchers, especially if they’re traveling and they don’t know the local zip codes, but this doesn’t help search engines, either.

Instead, companies should place text links on their websites to make it easier for search engines to find these pages.

Fig. 1: Optimize store locators



Source: Mary Bowling, Ignitor Digital

Several components should be built into a location directory:

- It should be visible on all pages of a company’s website and companies need to push page authority down to local pages to help those pages rank.
- The directory should be easy to use, with a logical, hierarchical structure made of internal text links.
- It’s also important to have accurate, up-to-date XML sitemaps, and to use schema markup wherever possible on pages.

A couple of important caveats:

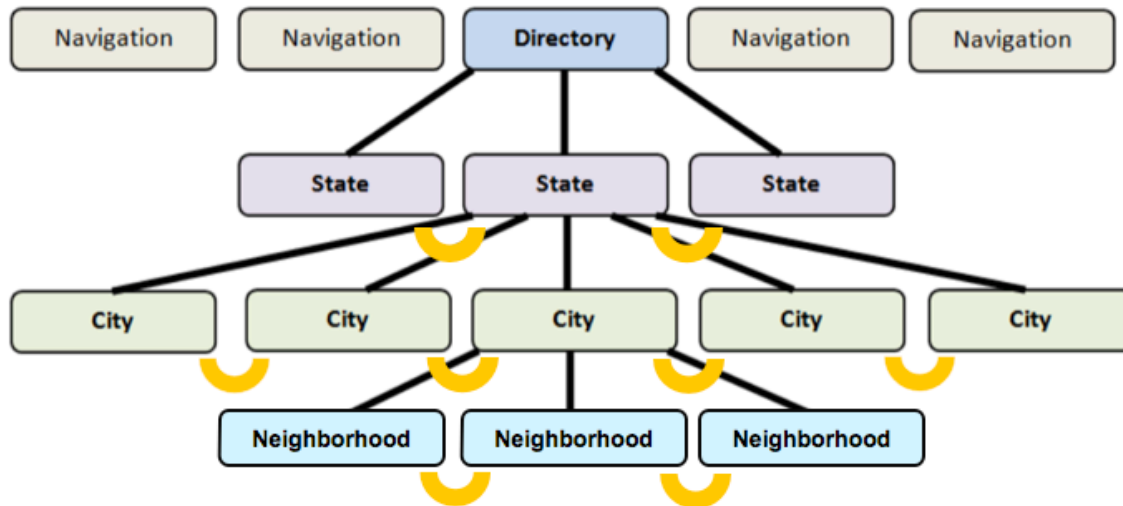
- Don’t make it difficult for people to find your company’s locations and don’t deprive the location landing pages and your store directory of the authority needed to rank well.

Have a directory structure that’s simple, logical and hierarchical; that represents all locations and ensures copious internal linking. For instance, link the state pages to pages of nearby states, city pages to pages of nearby cities and so on. This not only helps users move around a site, but it makes the site more crawlable for search engines.

When done well, store locators can have a significant impact. For Petco, an optimized store locator drove 42% lift in search engine volume across 1,470 local pet specialty retail locations.

Local directories benefit enterprise at local and corporate levels

Fig. 2: Build a super-crawlable structure



Source: Mary Bowling, Ignitor Digital

Building a site directory that can easily be crawled by the search engines is equally important when localizing a website. A good directory on a powerful brand website will yield higher rankings that will help local operators in several ways: the additional visibility will bring more new customers into local stores; the main directory eliminates the need for local websites; and the enterprise can localize content on their local page.

At the brand level, this provides more centralized control of the data about all locations, while also bringing a consistent look and feel to all the brand materials on the web. It can also foster greater loyalty from the local branches when the national team offers support in marketing local.

National brands can personalize

Companies of all sizes need to work on personalization and on being relevant to their customers. For national brands, it can be especially challenging to manage and maintain a hyper-local experience. With that said, it's not impossible and the rewards are well worth the effort.

National brands are oftentimes not necessarily seen as doing business locally. In fact, they may even be perceived as taking away business from local economies. The goal, as marketers of a national brand, is to communicate to all individual buyers and consumers that the brand is a national network, but a neighbor to buyers and consumers at the same time.

Personalization at scale

It's possible to be successful at personalizing at scale, as Amazon has proven: 56% of consumers say that Amazon demonstrates an understanding of individual preferences and needs on a regular basis.

Some examples of digital personalization include:

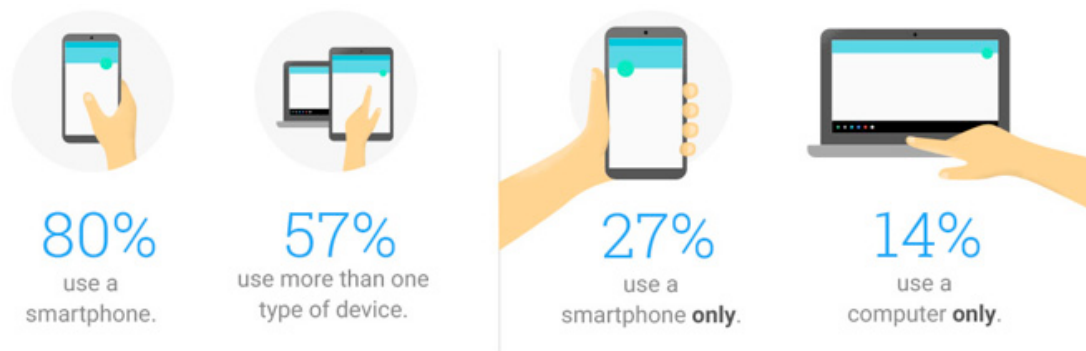
- **Remember Me (login):** Allowing a website to remember who a visitor is and signal that the website knows the user.
- **Locations Nearby:** Identifying locations in a visitor's local area.
- **Product Recommendations:** Offering product suggestions that are relevant to the visitor.
- **Personalized Customer Service Content:** Making a user experience more pleasant by offering personalized content.
- **Relevant Advertising:** Providing relevant recommendations and advertising to users anonymously.
- **Social Media Content That Matters:** Providing personalized pieces of content based on expressed interests as users visit a company's website.

There are other simple ways to add personalized content to a company's website: local maps, directions, inventory and pricing. Local reviews help with reputation management, and local phone numbers emphasize a personal experience more than toll free numbers do. It's also a good idea to provide local content that is relevant to the business, so visitors can make a connection between that valuable content and the company.

Why personalize on mobile?

Smartphones are becoming the option of choice, with 80% of consumers using a smartphone and 57% using more than one mobile device. More than one quarter (27%) of consumers use only smartphone, while just 14% use only a computer.

Fig 3. Consumers are more connected than ever



Source: Rio SEO

This creates challenges for businesses as they work to ensure they're delivering content in the ways in which consumers want that content presented to them.

It's a bigger challenge for companies if they're not successfully delivering content to that mobile consumer at all, though. According to Google, 61% of users are unlikely to return to a company's website if they're having trouble accessing information or if the information isn't delivered in a simple way. Most -- 40% -- will go to a competitor's site, instead. Local searchers are serious: 88% of consumers who search for a local business on a mobile device will call or go to that business within 24 hours.

There's no question that people are very accepting of personalization; most adults (62%) under the age of 34 are willing to share their location in exchange for personalized content. For them, relevancy is more important than privacy.

Localization is the ultimate personalization

As voice search takes off, the emphasis grows on the places and things that people are looking for in their local market, and becomes less about a specific brand. Unbranded keywords are becoming more important. As people are migrating toward mobile, they may not be thinking of a store's brand specifically. They're looking for dog groomers, not Petco, or school uniforms, not Old Navy.

It's important to engage at the local level and one effective way to engage customers is to have local landing pages for each store. This strategy will:

- Enable you to quickly and easily publish highly relevant pages for each location.
- Ensure rankings that get your locations found in search.
- Create interactions that convert searches to customers.

Think about how to offer relevant local content that will attract people to your store, to your service, to your organization.



Tips for creating localized content

- **Incorporate location-specific content.** If you're in hospitality or entertainment, how do you showcase attractions that are going on nearby? How do you highlight services your company offers, specifically in that location? The diversity of what happens from location to location is attractive to a mobile consumer; they want that level of granularity. How do you incorporate local events and promotions and social media, engage visitors to that specific location? It can also be helpful to highlight events and promotions being held at individual stores.
- **Don't forget user-generated content.** User reviews and comments are effective ways to get genuine, unscripted content that's diverse by location. By integrating that content into web pages, companies control what consumers and customers are interacting with. This can help increase user interaction at the local level and drive more local traffic to a company's locations.
- **Solve the need.** When it comes to personalizing content, it's about solving a need. It's not just "here are all the things I know about you," but "these are the things you're looking for and I'm going to deliver it to you quickly and efficiently and right at your fingertips." It's the best way to maximize your local experience for your local consumers.

Conclusion

Today's consumer appreciates – and expects -- a personalized experience when searching for products or services. Localized website and search listings content is an effective way to provide that experience and build strong customer relationships. To succeed at the local level is a process that involves localizing the structure and content of your website. Start with a strong locator tool; bring customers to your location, then show them what you've got and why they need to do business with you. It's worth the effort. ■

About Rio SEO

Rio SEO simplifies complex local search marketing to convert searches into sales. We partner with global, multi-location brands to optimize local listings and content across every major search engine, on every device. With scalable, cost-efficient search solutions on a full-service platform, we do more than list your business – we give it prime real estate.

Rio SEO works with major brands to increase local site visibility and drive local revenue. We partner with more than 100 retailers and service providers with 50+ locations and proudly maintain a 93 percent client retention rate. Our customers love us because we get results. To learn how we can help your business of 50+ locations, visit our website at www.rioseo.com

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