

# *What You Don't Know About Local Search Can Hurt You*

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Today, Web users conduct 1 billion local searches each month. These local searches can generate visibility for your stores, distributors or franchises and, even better, may lead directly to online and offline sales. It's critical to grab your share of these searches, as their numbers are growing rapidly.

But are you getting your share of local-search traffic? If you're not up to date on the realities of raising local-search visibility, the answer is "probably not." While many marketers and brand managers assume that their existing SEO efforts will cause their local business listings to be prominent in local searches, that's just not the case. The truth is, when it comes to local search, what you don't know may hurt you.

Here are some common misconceptions you might have about local search — and some information on how things really work:

## **I BUY KEYWORDS AND OPTIMIZE MY WEB SITE FOR SEARCH ENGINES. THAT SHOULD GENERATE GOOD LOCAL-SEARCH VISIBILITY, RIGHT?**

Actually, when users conduct a local search ("plumbers in Cleveland, OH"), the search engines usually don't draw on data from business Web sites. Instead, search sites tap into business-listings databases to generate results. So even if your site is highly optimized, it won't improve your standing in these critical listings. (Try it and see for yourself!)

### I HAVE A STORE LOCATOR ON MY CORPORATE SITE SO LOCAL SEARCHES WILL FIND OUR STORES.

Often, that's not the case. In reality, search engines may not crawl store-locator databases, as crawling those databases may violate some Web sites' privacy policy.

### MY INTERACTIVE MARKETING DEPARTMENT OR FIRM IS ALREADY SUBMITTING MY LISTINGS TO ALL OF THE MAJOR SEARCH ENGINES, SO I'M COVERED.

Yes, it's true that you can get your listings into local search by manually submitting them to individual Web sites. However, it's unlikely you'll get favored treatment — which could mean delays in your data acceptance and the schedule at which it appears. Besides, there are too many search sites to manage where your listings should/could appear. Ideally, you should be everywhere your consumers go to search for you.

### MY CURRENT BUSINESS LISTINGS (FROM YELLOW PAGES ADVERTISEMENTS OR OTHER DIRECTORIES) ALREADY DO ENOUGH TO ATTRACT WEB CONSUMERS.

You aren't getting full local search exposure if you rely on plain-vanilla business listings to attract local searchers. The business categories used for such listings offer only a topic or two by which to classify your business, which may not be enough. If a user is searching for "bridal gowns" and you're listed under "wedding gowns" it would be a shame not to show up, wouldn't it?

### I CAN RELY ON CONSUMERS TO GO TO MY CORPORATE WEB SITE AND USE THE STORE LOCATOR IF THEY WANT TO FIND MY STORE/FRANCHISEE/DISTRIBUTOR.

Actually, in a majority of cases, consumers are hoping to find a merchant that sells what they need ("athletic shoes in San Diego, CA" or "Nikes in Denver, CO") rather than searching for a particular business name. If you sell athletic gear, then you want consumers to find you when they're looking for running shoes — and the best way to do that is to make sure you have rich local-search content in place.

With the importance of local search growing every day, it's critical to make sure you're providing rich and updated local content to the search engines and Internet Yellow Pages sites. This is the best way to influence the accuracy, visibility, and ranking of how the engines represent your business.

Now that you know how local search really works, take advantage of that knowledge. You may be surprised how easy it is to improve your Web visibility.