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## 9 Steps to Rank on Google (Local SEO Guide)

*Search Engine Optimization* (SEO) is a way for your website to rank higher on Google, Bing and Yahoo organically (without paying for ads). When someone is searching for a business like yours, they often type a *keyword* (a word or phrase) into Google to find you. Your website should appear in the first three results so that they find your website and choose to do business with you. The great thing about SEO work is that it's not just good for your Google ranking, but all of the things you do will lead visitors to your website, and that means even more customers!

To outrank most of your competitors, you have to be better than them at the SEO game. Our core focus is building you a stunning website that is fully optimized on the backend for Google to crawl, and then when visitors arrive to your website, they choose you over your competitors. Therefore, we charge our clients and do things a little differently in the SEO world than other web designers. Search engines are constantly changing their algorithm, so these steps may vary from time-to-time, but we work hard at keeping this SEO guide as up-to-date as possible. Below are the 9 steps you can take (or hire us to do it for you) to win at SEO:

- 1. Market Research.** You need to understand how many people are searching the keywords you want to rank for, and where these people are located. [Google Keyword Planner](#) is an incredible FREE tool that Google offers. Its primary function is to plan keywords for Google Ads, but using it for SEO data is a smart move. After you've figured out the search volume for the keywords for your business in your area, you can rank them from most-searched to least-searched. Achieving results on Google with your top three keywords before moving on to the rest is a great strategy to focus your efforts.

*Pro Tip:* [Moz](#) has great resources and software to learn more about do-it-yourself SEO.

- 2. Google My Business.** Getting setup on Google Maps is vital to ranking locally. Competing for keywords on a national level is extremely expensive and time-consuming. Competing in your local area limits the amount of businesses you're trying to outrank and therefore makes it less expensive and faster to see results. To see an example of what we're talking about, type "Chattanooga dry cleaners" into Google and you will see a map with the dry cleaner locations listed. They're not competing with dry cleaners across the nation, but only in the Chattanooga area. To get started, go to [Google My Business](#) and follow the instructions. Have multiple locations? No problem! Google makes it easy to setup multiple locations. Don't have a location but a service area? Yet again, Google makes it easy to set your business as a "service area" instead of a specific location for people to visit. For example, you can setup your business to have a service area within a 20-mile radius from downtown Chattanooga. It's completely FREE and if you have trouble, you can always call Google for them to walk you through the exact steps. Google My Business can be reached at (844) 491-9665.

*Pro Tip:* Set up your business description with your top keywords from Step 1.

- 3. Google Reviews.** We have been extensively mentioning Google, and the reason is because Google is the hardest search engine to rank; because it is the most competitive; because it has the highest search volume. The theory is that if you rank in the top three results on Google, then you will rank on Bing and Yahoo as well. However, the steps mentioned thus far can be applied to any search engine to see results. Google has certain [guidelines](#) that prohibit dishonest reviews that are not from actual customers. That being said, gaining 5-star reviews from different IP addresses that are in the area of your business location can be extremely helpful when it comes to your local Google ranking. Gaining 10+ Google reviews is a good place to start. Certainly more reviews than your competitors are a good thing too!

***Pro Tip:** We can create a URL that makes it easy for you to provide your customers to leave a Google review. See [www.ChattanoogaWebDesign.com/Review](http://www.ChattanoogaWebDesign.com/Review) as an example.*

- 4. Local Directories.** Examples of local directories are Yelp and Yellowpages. There are many local directories (at least 50+). Getting your business on as many *credible* local directories as possible not only gives you more exposure online, but also boosts your SEO ranking. [Moz Local](#) is an incredible software that allows you to get on many local directories all at once without having to visit each website and fill out the info. The best part is that if your phone number or address changes, you don't have to go into each local directory and update it. Simply updated it on Moz Local and it will aggregate on all of your listings! Keeping your business accurate and up-to-date with minimal effort.

***Pro Tip:** This is the first thing mentioned in this SEO guide that costs money. It may take a few dollars, but it will save you countless hours in the future. It is highly recommended.*

- 5. On-Page SEO.** It's important that your website is constructed on the backend for Google to crawl and index easily. It's just as important though that your website have the content written with the keywords sprinkled throughout so that Google knows that your webpage is about those keywords, and should be ranked when someone is searching it. You don't want to mention your keywords too many times because you may get penalized. Google calls this [keyword stuffing](#) and frowns upon it. Instead, your webpage should have natural language that has your keywords mentioned enough to make up 1 – 3% of the written content. This number may vary, but for now, 1 - 3% is a good place to start. [Yoast](#) is an amazing WordPress tool to ensure your keywords are the right density. An ongoing blog that consistently increases the size of your website with quality relevant content, and has all the green lights from Yoast with right keyword density, is an essential element when it comes to ranking on search engines.

***Pro Tip:** Blogging is time consuming, but vital. There are a lot of different things that make up a compelling effective blog. You should do your own research on how to blog and when. A good place to start though is 1 – 4 blog posts per month. Oh, and don't post content that is on other web pages. [Duplicate content](#) runs the risk of penalization.*

**6. Off-Page SEO.** This is where things usually get confusing, time-consuming and expensive. Off-page SEO is anything that builds your website's credibility from factors that are not on your website. Some common examples are local directories, as mentioned in step 4, that link to your website and have the name of your business. Anytime a webpage links to your website, it boosts the credibility of your website in Google's eyes, and therefore gives you more "authority" and a higher ranking, IF it is a credible website. These links that lead people from other webpages to your website are called *backlinks*. A website that is credible and has high web traffic has more "authority" than a website that has low web traffic, and so their backlink will be of more value in boosting your SEO. *However, just like a backlink from a good website can help your ranking, a backlink from a bad website can hurt your ranking.* Generally speaking, though, the more backlinks you gain from credible websites, the better; and the more times your company is mentioned on the web, even if it's not a backlink, the better.

**Pro Tip:** *Your social media accounts that are linked to your website matter! Help boost your Off-page SEO with likes, reposts, shares, retweets and mentions in your social media channels.*

**7. White Hat vs. Black Hat.** Yes, this is real jargon and we're not talking about the good cowboys vs. the outlaws. Black Hat SEO is a way for you to gain a high ranking quickly and easily by "tricking" search engines and "beating" the system through understanding how their algorithm works. This may get you quick results in the beginning, but it's not going to give you lasting results without the fear of being penalized by Google. Google penalization is no joke. It is recoverable, but it takes a lot of time, energy and money.

**Pro Tip:** *Don't hire the companies offering "too good to be true" pricing or "guaranteed results". Quality SEO usually takes months and thousands of dollars if their doing it right.*

**8. Backlinks.** We touched on this in step 6, but it deserves its own paragraph because there are many factors that go into this. Google wants you to gain links from other websites organically. They want your website's content to be so compelling (your blog posts or webpages) that other websites want to point people your direction for them to see. This is hard to do. You DON'T want to pay someone to simply add links to your website all over the web (this would be considered Black Hat SEO). Google's algorithm will notice if you go from 0 to 100+ backlinks in a day, and won't like it. Instead, offer to guest blog post for local reputable websites. They will enjoy the free content and you can add a link to yourself. Wherever you find to add backlinks, just be careful that you slowly add them and they are from a reputable non-penalized website, and that they are not a "no-follow" link. [Moz](#) has great resources on how to add backlinks organically.

**Pro Tip:** *You can check the webpage source code to see if a no-follow attribute was added to your link. If you can't find out how by Googling it, ask us!*

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**9. Yellowpages SEO.** Yes, we are literally recommending you use another company to help you with your SEO. If you can successfully rank your website on Google using steps 1 – 8, then great! However, if you're not getting results, Yellowpages SEO in our opinion is one of the most cost-effective ways to organically rank your website on search engines. Their plans start at \$300 per month, but it all depends on competitiveness of the keywords in your area for your business. Go to <https://businesscentre.yip.ca/book-a-meeting> to learn more and book a free consultation that they offer.

**Pro Tip:** Moz is the one of the leading authorities on the web when it comes to Google and SEO. They not only have amazing software and classes to help you with your SEO campaign, but also a list of [SEO companies they endorse](#). It may take a little time to sift through all of them, but there are some great ones in the \$500 - \$5,000/month range.

We hope you have enjoyed reading through our SEO guide. It seems counter-intuitive that we would give you the secret recipe and teach you how to do it yourself. Frankly however, most small businesses are on a tight budget and it just makes sense that they would have a team member do it for them if at all possible. That being said, we would be more than happy to assist you in your Local SEO needs and perform steps 1 – 9 on your behalf. Our mission is to provide the very best client experience while helping you grow. We accomplish this primarily through stunning websites that have the highest conversion rate possible, but we understand SEO is a vital role in gaining web traffic as well.

Below is a list of all the resources mentioned in the order of appearance:

- Google Keyword Planner: <https://adwords.google.com/home/tools/keyword-planner/>
- Moz (education): <https://moz.com/learn/seo>
- Google My Business (Get on Google Maps): <https://www.google.com/business/>
- Google SEO Guidelines: <https://support.google.com/business/answer/2622994?hl=en>
- Moz Local (Online Directories): <https://moz.com/local/how>
- Definition of Keyword Stuffing: <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66358?hl=en>
- Yoast (WordPress SEO Plugin): <https://yoast.com/>
- Duplicate Content Definition: <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66359?hl=en>
- Yellowpages SEO (book a phone consultation): <https://businesscentre.yip.ca/book-a-meeting>
- Moz Endorsed SEO Companies: <https://moz.com/rand/recommended-list-seo-consultants/>
- FREEBIE – I Search From (check Google ranking from anywhere): <http://isearchfrom.com/>

We hope you've enjoyed our *Local SEO Guide* and will pass it along so that others could benefit. If you have questions, ideas or comments, please don't hesitate to give us a call or send us a message at [www.ChattanoogaWebDesign.com/#contact](http://www.ChattanoogaWebDesign.com/#contact). We would love to hear from you!