On-line Directories for Your Business?

In recent columns I have focused on your business’s on-line presence. A reader asked me “how about on-line directories, should I use them?” Good question! One of the simplest, yet most important, things you can do to enhance your online visibility is make sure your business name, address and other contact information is placed on the web in as many places as possible.

The most effective way to do this is to make sure your business is listed consistently across a variety of online directories. The word “directories” can be a bit deceiving, however. Yes, this can include online versions of old-school directories such as White Pages, Yellow Pages and the Better Business Bureau, but it also includes sites such as Facebook, Yelp, Angie’s List, LinkedIn, CitySearch and Foursquare. In fact, marketing experts that I talk to tell me that there are at least 50 online local business directories that you should consider, depending on your business goals and target audience.

But let us first take a look at some numbers from the U.S. Department of Commerce. In the third quarter of 2017, U.S. online retail sales reached $115.3 billion, up 3.6 percent from the same period a year earlier. That’s a huge number, of course, but it still represents less than 10 percent of total retail sales during the quarter, which came in at a whopping $1.27 billion. So, while online sales are significant and, on the rise,, the majority of sales still occur offline.

So a logical question is what can listings in a variety of directories do for your business? When looking for a particular product, service or business, searchers are more likely to use their phone than a computer. There is no doubt that many of these searches lead to online sales, but most people still prefer to do business face-to-face.

This is precisely where online directory listings can help — they can drive people to your business’s actual location. Even if you don’t have a storefront or physical office space where you can work with customers, keeping your address and contact info up to date will help your business show up in local searches performed in your area.

Where should you focus your online listings and directories to use? One of the most important is undoubtedly Google My Business. Google remains the dominant search engine on the web and likely will be for the foreseeable future. A listing on
Google My Business means you will also appear on Google Maps, a tool that many use when looking for directions. It also means that customers can post reviews of your business on Google.

However, in addition to Google, SCORE and its content partners like Deluxe Corporation report that there are many online directories you should/could consider, including (just to name a few): Angie’s List Best of the Web, Bing Places for Business, The Business Journals, Citysearch, DexKnows, Directory Critic, Foursquare, Google My Business, Hotfrog, Kudzu, Local.com, Manta, MapQuest, MerchantCircle, SuperPages, TripAdvisor, White Pages, Yahoo Local Listings, Yellow Pages, Yellowbook, YellowBot, Yelp, and Yext.

In general, the more directories you use, the better. It gives your business a larger presence on the web, which gives you the best chance of getting in front of customers looking for the product or service you offer.

Here are some important things to consider when you place your business in online directories:

- Make sure your information is identical across each directory. Websites and search engines can act intelligently, but only to a point. Like humans, they get confused if they’re given conflicting information. This is why you need to make sure your business name, address and phone number are listed in exactly the same way across the web.
- If your business is known by a few different names, pick one and go with it. Customers may call your business Pam’s Bar, Pam’s Restaurant, or Pam’s Bar and Grill, but that will only confuse search engines and directories. Choose the name you’d like to use to identify your business online and keep it consistent across listings.
- The same can be said for your address. You don’t want to list your address as 123 S. Main St. in one listing and 123 South Main Street in another. Even though the addresses are technically the same, keep the format consistent to avoid confusion.
- When your business information is listed repeatedly across the web, it builds credibility with search engines because they begin to realize the legitimacy of your business. Keeping your listings consistent is a simple task, but it is crucial.
- It’s also important to keep this in mind if your business moves locations or changes its name. It may take a bit of work, but if anything changes —
business name, address or phone number — be sure to update your listings accordingly.

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