

Regional Online Marketing Program

Part 2

Be there in the local search 2.0

“The most popular site is Facebook, used by 78 percent of online households, followed by MySpace (42 percent), LinkedIn (17 percent) and Twitter (10 percent).”

RULE #2: Be there in the local search 2.0

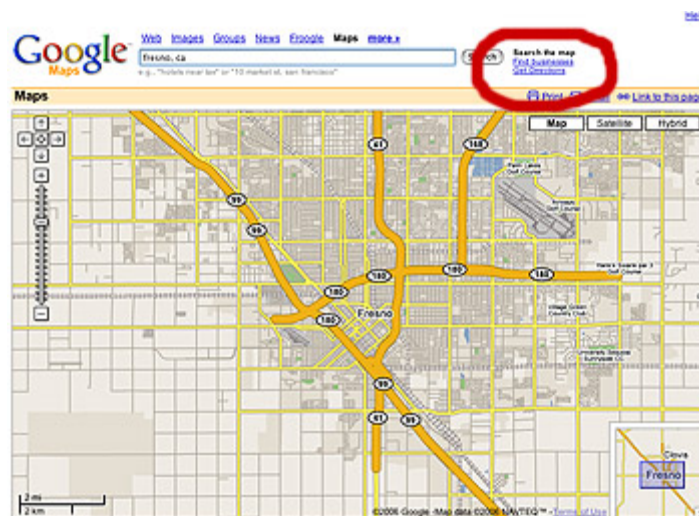
Because people usually purchase within a geographical area of their comfort zone, you need to establish a presence

Local Google Search

Where: <http://maps.google.com/>

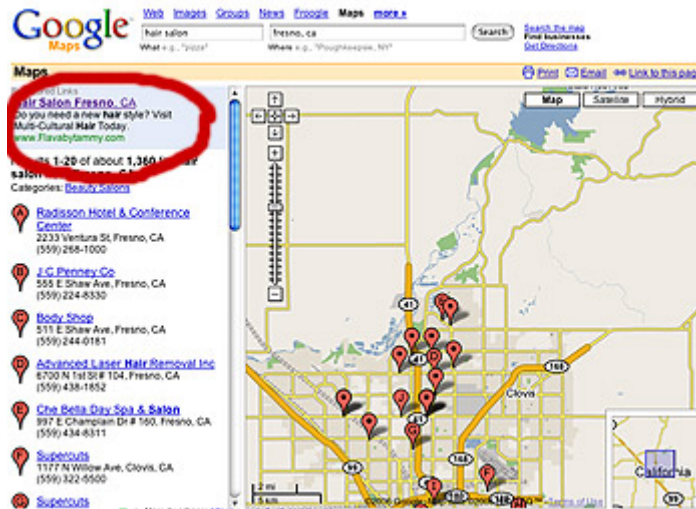
What: Google’s local search service is Google Maps.

How It Works: Type an address and see the map, or switch to a satellite photo, or even see a hybrid of the two. Here’s [Fresno, CA](#), for example. All you have so far is a map, no business information. But notice at the top, to the right of the SEARCH button, are a couple links. The middle link says “Find businesses.”



When you click that link, you have a new text field to type in the name or type of business you want to find. You might type in something like [hair salon](#) and click SEARCH. (Note: users can skip this step entirely by just typing in [hair salon fresno, ca] in their initial search.)

Now you begin to see advertising in the left column where the business listings are. In this example, there's one ad at the top of the listings (see image) and a couple more at the bottom of the listings.



These ads come from [Google AdWords](#), Google's pay-per-click advertising platform, which allows businesses a way to target ads to specific geographic regions and geographic-based searches.

How to Market:

A) Make sure your business is listed correctly by using Google's [Local Business Center](#). When you register your business, Google will send an activation code to your mailing address (snail mail). You have to return to the Business Center and provide that code before your listing will be accepted. Once you do this, Google says it'll be up to six weeks before your listing is added. You can continue to use the Business Center to update your business information, add a new business, etc.

B) Sign up for a [Google AdWords](#) account and create an ad campaign targeted specifically to your local area. This will allow your ad to appear only* when people in your geographic area are using Google; it won't show up when someone across the country does a search for the keywords you're bidding on.

* The geo-targeting is quite good, but not perfect.

C) *Only after you've done A and B* on this list are you able to create a [Local Business Ad](#). This is essentially an enhanced version of your AdWords ad. As Google explains:

The ads display in two parts: a highlighted listing in the search results column and a map marker that expands to show additional business details when the user clicks on the ad title or the marker itself.

In other words, your AdWords ad gets some extra attention in both the left column (the search results) of Google Maps, and on the map itself. Use the link earlier in this paragraph to learn about Local Business Ads.

Guide to Yahoo Local Search

Where: <http://local.yahoo.com/>

What: Yahoo's local search service integrates yellow page-style listings, Yahoo maps, user reviews and content, and other elements of Yahoo's network. Yahoo claims to have the largest market share among the online local search destinations.

How It Works: Yahoo Local starts with two text fields — one to indicate WHAT you're looking for, and the other to indicate WHERE. But the search box is just one aspect of the initial experience. By default Yahoo also shows a lot of local content to help you get started — user reviews of favorite restaurants, "other local favorites", and an invitation for you to add reviews to Yahoo Local. Rounding out this more comprehensive experience are RSS feeds and links to various categories of local businesses.

When you do a search, Yahoo's results are almost 180-degrees different from Google. Yahoo devotes most of its space to business listings, and forces a small map into the left column.

The screenshot shows the Yahoo Local Search interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text 'hair salon' and a location field set to 'Fresno, CA'. Below the search bar, the page displays 'Local Results' for 'hair salon' in Fresno, CA, with 18 out of 389 total results. A map on the left shows the search area with several yellow markers. The main content area lists sponsored results, with the first three highlighted by a red circle:

- Skinsations** A Skin & Hair Boutique
(559) 322-4929, 1715 Minnewaska Ave Ste 102, Clovis, CA
www.skinsations.com/Map | Directions | Send to Phone
- Head Over Heels Full Service Salon** Full Service Salon
(559) 438-4029, 8537 N Cedar Ave, Fresno, CA
Map | Directions | Send to Phone
- Multi Cultural Hair Specialists** Contact Us Today for Additional Information
(559) 213-5583, 3162 W Shields Ave, Fresno, CA
www.freshofamily.com/Map | Directions | Send to Phone

Below the sponsored results, there are organic search results for hair salons, including 'Celebrity Status Hair Salon', 'First Impressions Hair Salon', and 'That S. Mox Hair Salon'.

Paid ads are much more prominent on Yahoo Local than on Google. In this example, the first three listings are all paid ads, and are clearly noted

as such. These ads come from Yahoo Search Marketing's [Local Advertising program](#). There are often additional paid listings at the bottom of the page, too.

One thing worth mentioning is that Yahoo seems to struggle at times with its ad targeting. When you search for obscure businesses, Yahoo will continue to show paid listings that are not specific to the search term. For example, searches for [dog walking service] and [dog bathing service] included paid listings from animal hospitals, gourmet pet food stores and the like. (On similar Google Maps searches, the paid listings were all relevant to the search, though not necessarily to the location.)

So how do you get around this bug? When writing your listing, include every single possible service you offer. Use BOTH specific AND generic terms for things. Words to include are: new home construction, timber framing, log homes, post and beam, sales, project management, energy efficiency, etc. and so on. You get the idea. Do not just stick to our standard timber frame homes representative. Use as much as you can to get yourself out in as many places as possible.

How to Market:

A) At minimum, make sure your business is listed in Yahoo Local and that the information is accurate. You can do that via the [Local Listings Center](#) — look for the “Local Basic Listings” option, which is free. You’ll need a Yahoo account to do this. The submission process is fairly straightforward, and takes place completely online. When you’re done, Yahoo says your submission will be reviewed for inclusion within 3-5 business days, and invites you to check your submission status at the [Local Listings Account Center](#).

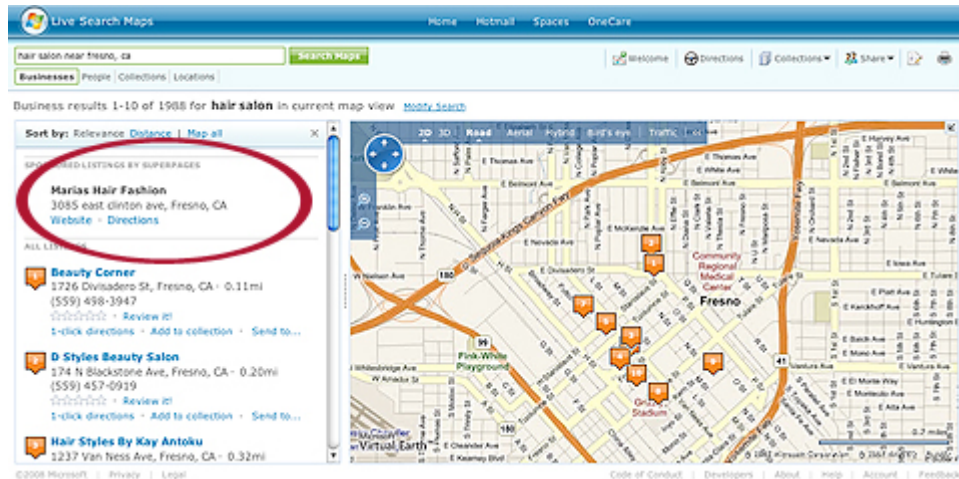
B) Also at the [Local Listings Center](#), you can sign up for either a “Local Enhanced Listing” or for a “Local Featured Listing.” Both of these services will add enhancements to the Local Basic Listing, and perhaps best of all for many small businesses, both services are flat-fee — making it easier on your current and future budgeting. I was a [fan of the Featured Listings service](#) when it debuted, and still am.

C) Yahoo Search Marketing offers [Local Sponsored Search](#), a pay-per-click advertising option that lets you target your ads in the geographic area(s) of your choosing. And you don’t have to have a web site because the program includes what Yahoo calls a “locator page” that displays all your pertinent business and contact information.

Guide to MSN Local Search

Where: <http://maps.live.com/>

What: Unlike its two counterparts, MSN uses a 3rd party — Verizon's Superpages.com — to provide paid advertising listings.



Paid ads appear at the top of the search results in the left column (see red circle in above image), but that's the only bit of advertising to be found on the page. These ads are provided by Superpages.com, a business directory owned by Verizon. My sample "hair salon near Fresno, CA" search produced just one ad, and it was relevant. To the right of the paid ad and an initial set of business listings is a large map with businesses plotted to match the results on the left.

How It Works: Live Search Maps, as it's called, begins with just one text field on its search form, but adds several extra links on the home page for functions like getting directions, browsing business categories, and exploring "Collections" — user-created map content.

Like Yahoo and Google, MSN's local search results page uses a two-column approach. One column shows business listings (and paid ads), the other uses Microsoft's Virtual Earth service to display locations of those listings. Business listings come from publicly available white pages and yellow pages.

How to Market:

A) You can [add your business listing](#) through MSN's Local Listing Center. When you begin that process, the first step is to check if your business is already listed. If not, the process to add the listing is simple. In addition to

the basic business information, you'll be able to add additional web page URLs, email addresses, as well as business hours, payment methods accepted, a tagline, up to 10 photos of your business, and more.

After you've submitted a new business listing, MSN Local will send you a confirmation code by snail mail. The last time I did this, the confirmation letter arrived in about 2-3 weeks. You'll need to enter the code back into the Local Listings Center to activate and confirm your business submission.

Some other sites for your business

CitySearch

[CitySearch](#) is a major provider of local information for sites including MSN, Ask.com, Expedia.com, Ticketmaster.com, and many others.

As a small business owner, you should make sure your business is listed — and listed correctly — in CitySearch. Start by searching for your business. If it's there, click through to your profile page. In the lower right of the main content column (under your business information) you should see two links — one inviting you to edit the listing if it belongs to you, and another inviting you to "suggest a correction" if you see something wrong. (see below)



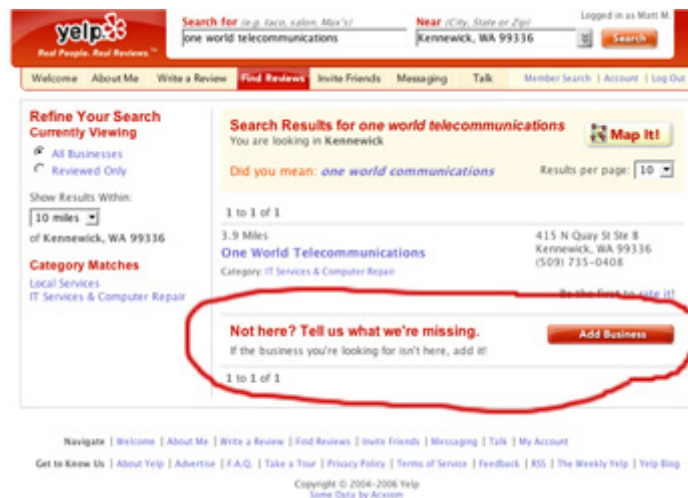
That first option is somewhat of a misnomer; you cannot simply claim your own listing and edit it. The only way to take control of your own listing is to

open an advertising account with CitySearch. The second option — “suggest a correction” — can also be used to add a new listing for free.

Yelp

Yelp is a growing entry in the local search arena, and follows in the Yahoo Local approach by including user reviews, but goes beyond that with other social/community-style features. Their goal is to develop a strong and active user community, which in turn should lead to more user reviews — all of which makes Yelp more valuable as a local search tool. Yelp began in San Francisco and is expanding out from there. Many smaller towns and cities have only a few user reviews, but the [San Francisco city page](#) shows the potential for this combination of local listings and an active user base.

Do a search for your business name and zip code to find out if you’re already in Yelp’s system. On the bottom of the search result page, you’ll see a red button titled ADD BUSINESS which leads to a simple form where you can add your business.



When adding your business, you can even rate it from one to five stars. But don’t get too excited about thinking you can spam the ratings — only registered users can rate, and every rating can be traced back to the person who submitted it. Not a perfectly spam-proof system, but probably good enough. During the sign-up process, remember to take advantage of the profile system. Your profile should be an advertisement for your business. This way, as you take part in the Yelp community, other users will be exposed to your business via your profile.

Yelp also offers paid advertising in the form of enhanced listings and featured placement in search results. Their web site offers few details about how these programs work, but they do invite business owners to complete a contact form for more information.

InfoUSA

InfoUSA is an information aggregator that compiles databases on businesses and households in the U.S. and Canada, getting information from white and yellow pages, business records, real estate records, newspapers, and more.

Chances are good that your business is already in their databases, but InfoUSA offers a [simple online form](#) for either adding your business or updating an existing listing.

Local.com



Local.com is a fast-growing local search engine that claims to get about 10 million visitors per month. They offer a variety of advertising options on the site, including banners and cost-per-click ads. The site shows user reviews with some listings; the reviews come from sites such as Insider Pages and Judy's Book.

Small businesses should, at minimum, take advantage of the [free basic listing](#), which includes your company name, address, phone number, web site URL, and a brief description. Local.com also offers a service called [Local Promote Premium](#), which includes a business profile web page and many additional information options. This service runs \$40/month.
