

# **SEO For The Small Business Owner**

**A Do-It-Yourself Guide for Local  
Small Business Search Engine Optimization**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

You've got this great idea for a new service business or you have become an expert in your field...or you are just simply determined to create and grow your own business and you know you can make a great offer. But (and here is the big but..no pun intended) who will know and who will care?

Finding ways to sell your service cost effectively and create a customer base is just as important as the great idea or the expertise. Many great ideas or service providers fail simply because they could not find their market..or their market could not find them. The internet is by far the best way to 1) bootstrap your new business 2) promote a new service 3) help a struggling business or 4) to build on an already successful one.

As of 2010 only 30% of small businesses had a internet marketing plan and 80% of the population was searching online for local services. I'm sure you can see the inherent opportunity in that.

Much of what needs to done to connect with customers online you can do yourself with some time and effort. And what you can't do can be outsourced effectively if you know how.

I use "connect with customers" instead of "reach" them because in search marketing the prospects are actively searching for your service, or at minimum have an expressed interest. This is a bit of a turnaround for business owners who are use to seeing advertising as a push function instead of a pull.

The intent of this book is to give you just enough information and know how to create an search engine optimization plan, get it off the ground and profit from it.

Your search engine optimization efforts don't necessarily need to be extravagant. As far as search engines are concerned it's the least bad that gets the best ranking. So you will only need to put in enough effort to be better than your local competition.

## Chapter 2

# Search Phrases (Keywords) for Local SEO

Search phrases or keywords are the words that a searcher types into a search engine to find something on the web. Search phrases are words loaded with intent. The intent and popularity of a search phrase are the criteria we use to select our search phrases for search engine optimization.

Search Phrases are the link between you and potential customers. If we think of a link to your website on the search engine results page (SERP) as a road sign advertising your business, the search phrase becomes the road on which the searcher travelled to see your sign. Choosing the right roads/search phrases for your signs (one that is travelled on by many people who are interested in buying your services now) is very important to you SEO success.

Choosing the right keywords is important because you will be making an up front investment to acquire a strong position on the SERP for your chosen keywords. In this chapter we will discuss some basic methodology for generating keyword ideas and choosing the best keywords to use in your optimization.

First we should discuss a concept important to helping us select the best keywords for our business goals.

### **Broad vs. Narrow**

A keyword that is broad is one that may be used in many contexts and has vague intent. One that is narrow is more specific and has clearer intent. For example, the keyword “roofing” is a broad keyword and “roofing contractor” is more narrow. Generally speaking the shorter the keyword phrases the more broad it is.

You will find that broad keywords have a much higher search volume. But higher search volume doesn't in itself make a keyword more valuable. The intent of a broad search phrase may have many possibilities. The value for you as the small business owner

comes from the specific intent of the search. The searcher using “roofing” for a search may likely be looking for advice on how to roof, among many other possibilities, and not for a local business that provides roofing services.

If you were a roofing contractor and you optimize for a broad keyword like roofing for SEO you will find two forces working against you. First, because it’s such a broad, high search volume keyword there will probably be a lot of competition. The other force working against you is that your conversion rate on that keyword will be low. So even if you put lots of effort into getting into the top 3 positions for a broad keyword and you get a lot of clicks, you may still not get many conversions (contacts).

On the other hand, optimizing for a search phrase that is more specific (more narrow) like “roofing contractor” may get less search traffic but have less competition and a much higher conversion rate on the click throughs that you do get. The contacts you get will more likely also be from people who are at the end of the buying cycle and ready to make a purchase.

The ability to assess your keywords for their level of specificity (broad vs narrow) will be useful later in this chapter after generating a keyword list to weigh your options.

## **Search Phrase Selection Process**

### **Discovery:**

The first step in selecting keywords that are best to target for your SEO campaign is keyword discovery. And the first step in keyword discovery is to brain storm and list all the possible keyword variations you can think of. Think about the words that someone ready to buy would use and make a list of them.

You can usually figure out what words will be searched for by using common sense when creating this list. Imagine that you are searching for a business like your own and determine what kind of words and phrases you would search for. Open your mind and really think about all the possibilities.

Another method is to search on google with some of the keywords you came up with above. Look at the search results for other ways of expressing your search phrases. Look at blogs and articles online and see what language they are using.

Also be sure to consider all versions of your search phrases. For example, “roofing contractor” is also “roofing companies” ... and another phrase for “auto parts shop” may be “auto parts store”. Write down as many variations you can think of.

These search phrase ideas are what you will use as your “seed” keywords in the google keyword tool.

## Google Keyword Tool

Now that you have a list of keyword ideas let’s put them into the google keyword tool and see what google “suggests”. There are many good keyword research tools out there. But google is free and for our purposes works just fine.

Here’s how to use the google keyword tool to generate search phrase suggestion and use the associated data to select the best for your SEO.

1. Go to the google keyword tool. The easiest way is to search on google “google keyword tool”
2. In the “word or phrase” field copy and paste the search phrase ideas to came up with that you think your customers will use to find you. Try to include every variation . For example, if you are a contractor include that word but also include words like company. And don’t forget plural versions
3. Hit the “Search” button and google will generate a list of keyword ideas.
4. Find the “download” button and select “all (#)”. Download and open the list. It will include a list of keywords along with google monthly searches for each keyword; global and local.

5. We are most interested in local searches since our SEO is for a local business. If you don't know how to sort data in an excel spread sheet now is the time to learn. Sort the keywords by "Local Monthly Searches".

6. Next I like to go through and delete the keywords that are not relevant or I consider way to broad for the list. Now I have a list of possible keywords sorted by monthly local search volume and I can make some decisions.

7. You can repeat this process as many times as you like using the keyword list that you originally generated.

## Keyword Selection

This process may have given you some keyword ideas that you had not thought of. Or maybe it sparked some new ideas. You may also see some opportunities to add plurals and phrase variations. Don't bother with misspellings, google corrects for those.

You can also take some of those keywords and input them back into google and see what you get. Any additional keywords you generate that seem like good candidates you will want to add to you sorted list. This process can be repeated as many times as you want.

Now comes the subjective part. You have to make your best guess at what the most common intent of a search is. You want phrases that are used by searchers who really want to start the process of making a purchase. You will want to weigh the search volume with the relevance and intent of a search and select the keywords you will use for your SEO.

You will want to select no more than three keywords to optimize your home page for and two for each inside. We optimize specific pages for specific keywords. More on that later. For now select your keywords and use some common sense to group them in a way that you could easily see them used on the same page in the same context.

Here's an example:

| <b>Keyword</b>  | <b>Page</b>   |
|---|---------------|
| philadelphia realtors<br>realtor in Philadelphia<br>Philadelphia realtor office | Home Page     |
| real estate agent in Philadelphia<br>philadelphia real estate agent             | Inside Page 1 |
| real estate brokers Philadelphia<br>philadelphia real estate broker             | Inside Page 2 |
| real estate companies Philadelphia<br>philadelphia real estate company          | Inside Page 3 |

Notice, we kept similar terms together; terms that had the same terms or references in them. This will make it easier to write copy and put focus the emphasis on the phrases. Otherwise you will spread your SEO thin on the page.

## Chapter 3

### Meta Tags

First let's start by explaining what exactly meta tags are. They are simply HTML codes that are placed within the header, following the title tag on web pages. They are data about the data on the web page.

Meta tags generally refer to the Title, meta description and meta keyword tag. The title and description tags are not seen by visitors to your page but are instead "seen" and displayed by search engines.

Many people use meta tags wrongly. This chapter will give you some direction on what kind of meta tags you should use for optimization, what you should do with them and what you should avoid doing with them.

Search engines put considerable weight on the Title tag and meta description. This makes sense considering that they may actually show these two when presenting search results. Just like this...

[SEO Website Builder | SEO Website Optimization](#) 🔍

[www.netlocalseo.com/seo\\_small\\_business\\_website.html](http://www.netlocalseo.com/seo_small_business_website.html) - Cached

SEO Website Builder | NetLocal SEO Website Optimization is an affordable way for a small business to create a strong presence on the web for LOCAL Searches ...

The heading here was pulled from the title tag on the page and the copy below the URL was pulled from the description tag.

It's important that we include our keywords in the title and description tag for two reasons:

1. The obvious – to optimize our rankings on search engines for our keywords
2. To let the searcher know that they will find the products and services they are searching for on our web page.

The search engines don't place much if any weight on the keyword meta tag. But you can park the keywords in this meta tag to remind you what keywords you optimized a given page for.

Here is what the html code looks like for the title and meta tags:

```
<head>
```

```
(bunch of other code here and there)
```

```
<title>SEO Website Builder | SEO Website Optimization</title>
```

```
<meta name="description" content="SEO Website Builder | NetLocal SEO Website Optimization is an affordable way for a small business to create a strong presence on the web for LOCAL Searches quickly" />
```

```
<meta name="keywords" content="LOCAL SEO Website, SEO Website Services, netlocal seo website builder" />
```

```
(bunch of other code here and there)
```

```
</head>
```

This code was used in the title and meta tags for the web page in the SERP example above. You can see how Google is presenting the title and meta description in their results.

To implement this you will need access to the html code of your web pages. You can simply copy the code from above and replace the content we have with your own.

#### **A few best practices for Title and Meta Tags:**

1. Try to put you keywords at the beginning of the copy in these tags.
2. Avoid words like “and” and “the”. The search engines ignore them and they just take up character space.
3. Keep your Titles and Meta tags succinct. Search engines look at the ratio of keyword to total text in your Title and Meta. So too much unnecessary text will dilute the effect you are try to create.
4. On the other hand try to communicate with the searcher. They will see other links when they search. Why should they click on yours? Consider putting a tiny sales pitch in your title to encourage the searcher to click on your web page. And definitely put it in your description Meta tag.
5. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the length of titles and meta tags. But from search engines point of view and according to norm here are some good guidelines:  
Title Length - 60 to 70 characters  
Description Length - 150 to 200 characters  
Keyword length - 256 characters.
6. Avoid repeating keywords. The search engines will see that as spam.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Web Page Content**

For the sake of SEO, web page content is Google food. (not just google of course, but google food just has a nice ring to it). Google and the other search engines will

download (crawl) your web pages and parse out the text. The text on a web page is what the search engines use to determine what your web page is “about”.

In this chapter we’re going to learn some basics for web page content structure and how to optimize for specific keywords. But first a quick word about web page writing style.

### **Writing for the Web**

Writing for web landing pages intended to generate conversions is different from writing, for example, an eBook on SEO. The biggest difference is attention span. On average you will have about three seconds to convince the searcher that they have landed on a website that can help them.

Partly this is done through the right design and through using images to communicate. The brain can absorb the gist from an image more quickly than reading print. So if you can think of ways to get your message across with an image, by all means do it. But how does that relate to SEO? Well it doesn’t. Search engines can’t get the gist of an image. For them we need print.

When writing your web pages always keep the searcher/customer in mind. Try to think about what might catch their attention quickly and keep them reading.

Make sure that it’s obvious what your website is about, what you are selling and what they can do or find on your site pertaining to the keyword you are promoting. Put the most important points, the ones that will speak to the customer’s needs and fears most directly in the top half of the page where the searcher can see it without scrolling down. (above the fold)

Remember, the searcher searched for something specific. Make sure they know they have found it.

Put the main subject of the page in the main heading. Try to write in short sentences and paragraphs. Make your text lines no more than 4 inches wide. Use generous line spacing. Use bullet points when you can. And use at least a 14 point sans serif font.

Now on to the SEO.

## **Page Structure**

Good SEO web pages are well organized. They have a main heading and subheadings and the copy within each heading and subheading are themed, at least to a degree.

The basic, minimum layout we use when writing a page is main heading with two subheadings. But the more competitive the domain the more elaborate we get. We may have main heading and 4 or 5 sub headings with nested sub headings in the sub headings and sub headings in the sub-sub headings.

Why so much focus on the headings? First of all the search engines put more weight on the words that are in the headings. So we always put our main keyword in the main heading. And our secondary and latent semantic keywords (more on that in a bit) in the sub and sub-sub headings.

Headings on web pages are designated with the html tags of <h1>, <h2>, <h3>..and so on. The <h1> tag being the top/main heading.

So before you start writing first create an outline that will provide the basis of your heading structure. Your main heading should always have your main keyword in it. If we're optimizing a page for two keywords I will either try to fit both in the main heading or, if that doesn't seem right, choose one that we think is most important for the main heading and put the other in the first subheading.

## **Latent Semantic Words**

Before we discuss writing your copy for SEO we need to talk a little about Latent somatic keywords and how to find them.

If you were Google how would you know if the text on a web page is actually informative versus a page with a bunch of nonsense. One way is to look for words and phrases that one would expect to find together.

For example, when reading about search engine optimization you would expect to see words and phrases such as “keyword”, “ranking”, “web page”, “google”; and so does Google. The presence of latent semantic words in your copy helps to validate the content of you web pages. So it’s a good idea to include them in your writing.

To identify latent semantic words you can use the quintura online tool at <http://www.quintura.com>. Enter your keyword and quintura will show latent semantic words that you should include in your copy. You can also click on the words quitura displays and drill down for additional ideas.

### **Writing the Content**

Now that you are armed with your keywords, your page heading structure and your latent semantic words you can start writing. Generally speaking you will want at least 250 words per page.

The first section under the main heading is a good place for a general introduction. And then, based on the subheadings you’ve written add the copy specific to each section.

While writing the copy don’t get too hung up on inserting the keywords. It’s better to just write in a way that will communicate and then go back and tweak it for keywords. Your copy may suffer if you are thinking about how to work in the keywords while you’re writing.

After the copy is written it needs to be implemented on a web page. Once it’s on the web page we can use some online tools to check for keyword ratio and placement.

Here are the two tools you will need; Google toolbar and SEO Quake tool bar plugin. You will need to download and install them.

<http://www.google.com/toolbar/ff/index.html>

<http://www.seoquake.com/>

First we’re going to use the Google toolbar to check for keyword placement. For this you will need to activate the “highlight all” feature.

We are looking to make sure our keyword is in the right places on our page. At minimum, we need it to be in the main heading, in the first paragraph and near the end of our copy.

First navigate to the web page you are optimizing. Then type your keyword into the google search field on the toolbar and click the highlight button. Each instance of the keyword phrase on the page will be highlighted and you can see where each one is. If you don't see your keyword in the right places now is the time to try and fit them in.

Next we're going to use SEO Quake to check for the keyword density. There are plenty of other tools out there for checking keyword density so if you prefer something else please go ahead.

With SEO Quake installed you will see a toolbar on your browser that will show you SEO information about the web page you are on. At the top left you will see a link for "info". Click the link and scroll down on the info page. You will see keyword density information about your web page.

Find your keyword and if the keyword ratio isn't at least 2% you will need to go back to your web page and find some opportunities to add your keyword.

Try not to clump the keywords into one area on the web page. Using the google toolbar highlight feature is helpful for this. I usually go back and forth between the two tools as I'm tweaking until I have the right keyword ratio placed on the page where I want it.

Now two more final tweaks. Bold the keyword in the first paragraph. In the later sections add at least one in line text link to a web page on your site with a related topic. Internal linking to create themed domain silos is an important topic for larger websites with many products or services. But it is out of the scope of this book.

## Chapter 5

### Google Places Optimization

Google Places has attained more importance since the changes google made in its SERP in October 2010 to present them in different ways. For many years google presented Places on a separate area, usually just under the adwords section or at the very top of the page. This traditional presentation was sometimes refer to as the 6 Or 10 pack. And in many cases they still presents them that way. But now, depending on the type of search and the device, they may integrate them into natural results.

Google will only show a Place when it thinks that you are searching to find something local. If you search for a product or service and include a location they will usually show you Places. And sometimes they will show Places without the location defined if they feel the search itself indicates an intent to find a local service.

Here's an example: search "landscaper" and then search "landscapers". When I search "landscaper" I do not get Places in my results. When I search "landscapers" I do. Google probably thinks the intent of "landscaper" is more likely a search for information about landscaper; where as "landscapers" indicates a search for a service provider.

This keyword example is not only an informative for Place Pages on the SERP, but also gives us some insight into the way google "sees" keywords and can be used as part of the keyword selection process.

Now let's look at the way Google presents Place Pages. First let's look at the traditional presentation.

▶ **Handyman - Need home improvement? | handyman near me**

handyman near me  
484-801-0591 Friendly & fast home improvement.

**Top-Rated Handymen - Find Local Handyman Services | ServiceMagic.com**

www.servicemagic.com  
Backed By Our Service Guarantee!


**Places for handyman near Pottstown, PA**

- A to Z Handyman** - Place page  
www.atozhandymaninc.com - 397 Nester Drive, Pottstown - (610) 551-9533
- D & D Handyman Service, LLC** - Place page  
ddhandyman.com - 2865 Shire Drive, Pottstown - (610) 310-6521
- Franco's Services** - 1 Google review  
www.francoservices.com - 1656 Brynne Lane, Pottstown - (484) 302-1840
- WallpaperPlus+** - Place page  
www.wix.com - 44 West 3rd St, Pottstown - (484) 366-3067
- Stultz Stucco** - Place page  
maps.google.com - 309 East Moyer Road, Pottstown - (610) 326-8847
- Odd-Job Bill** - Place page  
maps.google.com - 2086 Sunnyside Avenue, Pottstown - (610) 323-4785
- Peters Handyman** - Place page  
maps.google.com - 798 White Pine Lane, Pottstown - (610) 327-8619

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www.hire-contractors.com/handyman/Pottstown/PA - Cached



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(610) 327-8060

**Todd D Miller Landscaping**



1 Google review

Ads

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610-802-1512  
Serving Pottstown & Boyertown

**Local Landscapers**

www.landscapingnetwork.com  
Reliable Service - Great Prices.  
Compare Landscapers Near You.

**Backyard Landscaping**

www.jweitzellandscaping.com  
Turn your backyard into a place to relax with backyard landscaping

Note how the Places balloon is incorporated into the natural results. This makes apparent the fact that the success of your SEO and the success of your Places pages to generate business are intertwined. They support each other as we will discuss below. Both need to be optimized to be successful in local search.

If you were thinking, “I think I will just update my Places Page and I will get some business” then you may be mistaken. What is on the places is page is only one of the factors that is used to rank Places for a given search. Let’s now learn more about those factors and specifics on how to improve your Places ranking.

## Places Pages Optimization Factors

### Ranking of Places Pages

Google Places/Google Maps search results are mostly based on three factors: relevance, prominence, and distance. Google combines these factors in an effort to find the best match for a given search.

As a result Google may rank a Places Page higher for a given search even if the business is further away because of better relevance and prominence. Google does this because they feel that this will more likely provide the searcher with what they are looking for.

Here's what relevance, prominence and distance mean in Google Places:

**Relevance:** Relevance is how well a Places Page content matches what someone is searching for. This is why it’s important to create a high quality listing that has lots of “stuff” on it and is optimized for your keywords. A complete and detailed Places Page will help Google understand your business and match it to relevant search results with high rankings.

**Prominence:** This depicts how “well-known” a Places Page is. This is based on information Google has about a business from across the web like links, articles, and directories. Each instance is called a citation and, as a whole, is a very important factor in Google Places rankings.

Each time Google recognizes your business name across the web you have the opportunity to add a citation. If google finds your business name along with its matching address, phone number, URL and email address you have a better chance of Google recognizing this as a citation. As citations build up over time your Places Pages prominence will improve. As a result your rankings boosted.

How well your website is optimized for your keywords will also affect your Places Page prominence. Google will relate the website that you specify in your set up to your Page and factor that into local searches helping to boost your places page position if the keyword is a good match. And this is a two way street; the more presence you have in the local and vertical directories the better rankings your website will have. It’s an eco system – nothing is isolated, everything affects everything else in some way.

**Distance:** This one is pretty obvious. When a local search occurs, Google calculates the distances of relevant business from your target and factors that distance in. If a location is not specified in the search, they calculate distance based on what they know about your location. Among other things, this can be based on the location the searcher has specified in their Google account, where they connect to internet service or, in the case of mobile devices, their GPS location.

And there isn’t too much you can do about the distance factor other than to specify it on your Places account. If you are a service provider who serves a wide geo graphic area, make sure you specify that. Under “Service Area and Location Setting” select “Yes, this business serves customers at their locations”, and specify your service area.

So by enhancing our online relevance and prominence we can we can show up at a higher position than our competition for a given search when we are equal distance and even sometimes when we are further away.

## Relevance - Optimizing Your Places Page by Creating a great listing

### Google Places Quality Guidelines

Before creating your listing you may first want to review the google Places Page quality guidelines. You will find some important do's and don'ts there:

<http://www.google.com/support/places/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=107528&ctx=checlist>

To update your Places page you will need a google account. If you don't have one now is the time. Go to the google search page and look near the top right for "login". Click on that and you will be taken to a page where you can create an account.

Once you have you account you can add Places to your services and search for your business on Places. Since Google pulls data from many resources there may already be a page for your business even if you didn't set one up. If there is already a listing you can now claim it. If there isn't one then you will create a new listing.

Now you are ready to update the Places information for your business.

*Note: The more information you can put into your Places Page the better for search success. That includes videos, images, coupons...read more.*

### Basic information

It's important that the information you use on your places account matches what Google finds across the web. So this part not only relates to relevance, but also prominence. Each time Google finds you somewhere on the web associated with the Places data...and they match, you may receive a citation which will help improve your ranking.

When you enter basic information about your business, make sure you include the following:

**Company/Organization:** This is the business name known in the offline world. Don't spam by including a keyword here. Been there, done that, and Google has been on to it for a long time now. They will eventually shut down your listing and you will have to start all over.

**Address:** Enter your address the same way it would appear on a paper mail envelope.

**Phone number:** Make sure to include the area code with your business phone number. It must be a phone number Google can use to call and verify your listing. Even if you use a

post card verification they do random calls to check and you must be able to answer the phone.

**Website:** List your keyword optimized business website as your homepage, since Google uses information from your homepage to help improve search results. The URL you provide can be a maximum of 255 characters.

**Description:** Tell users about your business and **make sure to include your keywords!**

**Email address:** Use an email with your URL instead of gmail or yahoo..etc. This helps to verify the link between your business listings, your website and your business.

### **Categories**

Categories are ways to classify your business that help Google show your business for the right searches. The Google Places will suggest categories that match what you type, but feel free to create your own if you don't see a category that fits your business. Make sure that the categories you choose are accurate and describe your business well. It's ok if they're specific; Google's search algorithm makes sure that users looking for a general business type, like 'florists' will see businesses in more specific categories too.

### **Serve customers at location or their's?**

If you serve customers at their location you can specify a service area here.

### **Hours of operation**

Let customers know when your business is open.

### **Payment options**

Specify the payment types you accept.

### **Photos/Videos**

This is where you add your logo. Also add any picture you have related to your business. The more the better. Same goes for videos on YouTube. Name you pictures using your keywords.

**Prominence**

Each time Google recognizes your business name across the web you have the opportunity to create what is called a citation. If google finds your business name along with its matching address, phone number, URL and email address you have a better chance of Google recognizing this as a citation. Citations are what help boost Places page with prominence.

Does every piece of business information mentioned above need to be present to create a citation. Probably not. But try and get as much of that information in each mention as you can. This will help improve the number and quality of the citations you get.

## About the Author



John DiBella is the founder and owner of NetLocal, LLC, a Search Engine Optimization Company for small businesses with a local market. John's background includes a Masters Degree in Information Systems from Drexel University, a BA in Business Finance and 15 years experience in business management. He uses his business and information systems background everyday to help small businesses succeed on the web. You can find John on LinkedIn at [My LinkedIn Profile](#)

NetLocal, LLC offices are located in the Philadelphia, PA Metro area.

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