



## How to Improve Your Hotel's Local Search Rankings

The forces driving local search rankings are constantly changing. But recent studies suggest that in 2019, four key factors make up the local search algorithm.

**The most significant factor is Google My Business (GMB).** If you're not on it, get on it now. GMB is a free online tool for businesses and organizations to manage their online presence on Google, including Search and Maps.



It allows you first to verify your business, and then to enter and update your business information so customers can find you and learn about your company. New features on GMB allow you to create posts and can include the use of photos and videos as well as promoting special offers. Posts drive the rankings, so you should always use industry keywords in them. GMB also has a Q & A feature. Be sure to answer all questions and ask questions of your own, which allows you to add more content. GMB is by far the most used business review site, with average monthly U.S. traffic of more than 158 million visits. The closest competitor is Facebook with just over 85 million hits.

**The second key factor is creating links on your sites to other local-specific and industry-specific sites.** Those referrals or “sponsorships” are difference-makers in the algorithm and allows you to leverage the power of the internet. But make sure the sites and the organizations you link to are legitimate and in high standing. Algorithms reward linkage to high-quality sites. Also focus on local and industry-specific sites. When you “link out” your site visitors are more likely to trust and value your site, according to recent studies. Those companies you link out to may in turn “link in” to your site, driving more traffic to you. Ultimately it will expand your visibility on the web.

**The third factor is online reviews.** One statistic says it all: 63 percent of customers are more likely to make a purchase from a site that has user reviews. Those consumers also spend more money per order than visitors who did not read reviews. The quality of the reviews matters greatly. A single bad review can cost you customers. It's important to have lots of high-quality reviews, and to respond to those reviews on the rating sites. This is a great opportunity to engage with current and potential customers. Be sure your responses use plenty of keywords. This is a chance to add content about your company. GMB and some other sites will notify you by email when you get a review so you can respond promptly.

**Finally, it is important to spread your online presence beyond Google by participating on other prominent business rating sites (like Yelp, Foursquare, Amazon and Yahoo! Local), but also sites that are specific to your industry or location.** That diversification can be crucial because it allows you to see on which sites your competitors are receiving reviews so you can increase your visibility on those sites as well. While GMB is a “must” site for increasing your local search rankings, don’t underestimate the power of participating on multiple sites. It gives you credibility as well as visibility.

Citations, which is when your company is mentioned on other websites and places on the internet, were once a force in the local search algorithm. But the influence of citations has diminished in the algorithm as the use of them has grown. This is not because they are less important now, but because they are so important as to be considered a staple for any business site. Don’t forget them.

These steps toward the top of local search rankings may seem time-consuming, but you’ll find when you start using them that many of your competitors are not making the effort to optimize their local search rankings. This will help you leap past them in the rankings. And, after all, that’s your goal!

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