

Here are some ways you can drive local traffic to your website:

1. Local search engines. Most of the major search engines permit you to list your website and attach it to a specific geographic area. These locally-focused websites include: Google Local <http://local.google.com/>, Yahoo Local <http://listings.local.yahoo.com/>, MSN Local <http://local.live.com/>, InfoUSA http://dbupdate.infousa.com/dbupdate/startupdate?bas_request=A, Merchant Circle <http://www.merchantcircle.com/corporate/>, TrueLocal.com <http://www.truelocal.com/BusinessSuggest.aspx>, Local.com http://advertise.local.com/search_buslisting.aspx, and CraigsList.com.

2. Other local directories. Many times local media, organizations, or businesses offer locally-based directories where you can list your business for free or for a fee. Places you might check in your local area include regional or local newspapers, television stations, regional or city magazines, independently owned local directories, city guides of major search engines (like Yahoo City Guide), profession or industry directory, regional/state sites, and chamber of commerce or visitor bureau sites. Ask your local clients where they look online for local goods and services to give you an idea of the sites your target market actually uses.

3. Recommendation/review sites. Many of the locally focused websites noted above offer visitors the opportunity to post testimonials or reviews about the products or services of a business. Take a few minutes to ask your local customers to go in and review your business. These recommendation sites include: AOL City Guide, JudysBook.com, InsiderPages.com, AngiesList.com, and Yelp.com.

4. Optimize your website for local search. There are a number of tweaks you can add to your website to optimize it for local searches. These include:

--Local terms in your page titles (i.e. don't use home page as your home page title but Seattle Professional Organizer as the title of your home page).

--Local terms in your anchor text, which is the visible, hyperlinked text on a web page that's often underlined and/or a different color than the rest of the copy (i.e. don't use your business name, Aamco Financial Services, but use New York City Financial Planning Services instead).

--Local terms in your H1 and H2 tags (headlines) (i.e. those headlines that are flanked by H1 and H2 header code in the HTML code of your page) --Local terms in the body of your pages (i.e. mention "Houston professional dog groomer" rather than simply dog groomer or your business name in the content of your pages).

5. Location map on your site. Make it easy for locals to find you. Google Maps makes it very easy to embed a map of your location on a page of your website.

6. Physical address. Including your physical address on all pages of your site gives the search engines yet another reason to index you to be found locally.

7. Inbound Links. Request inbound links to your website from other local businesses. Search engines especially favor one-way inbound links from highly trafficked sites, so if you don't have to list a reciprocal link back to the linking site on your site, the linking strategy becomes even stronger. Instead of using your business name as the anchor text, use a geographic description of your business as described in strategy #4 above.

If you have business with local clientele, it's not too late to make sure that your business can

be found through local search. After all, you don't want to send your target market to the competition, do you? *Copyright (c) 2007 Donna Gunter*