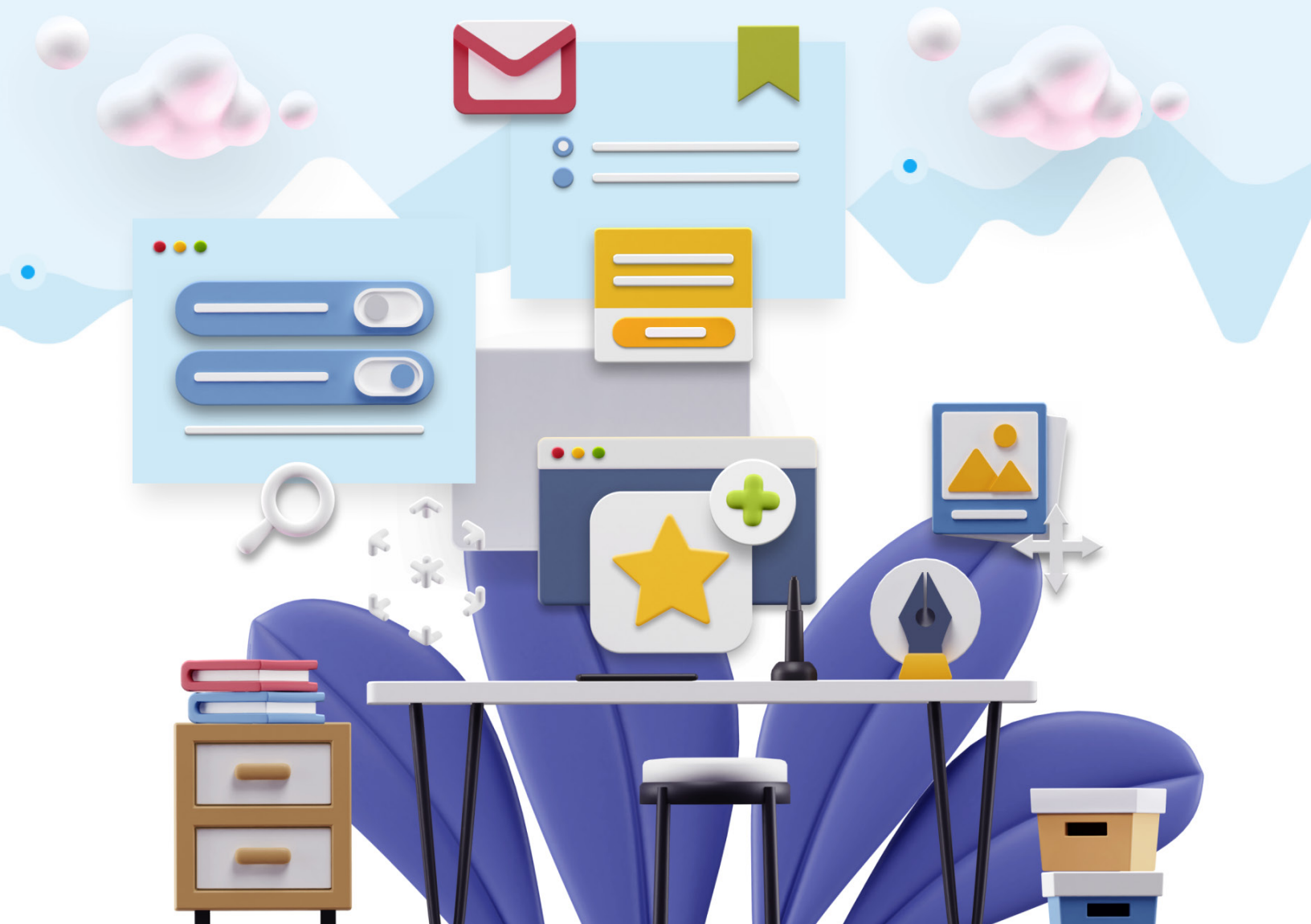




CogentMarketing

Local Citations:

The Complete Guide



Local citation management is a core part of local SEO and can be a great foundation to build upon, especially for businesses just starting out on their journey and agencies working with them.

In this complete guide to local listings management, we'll walk through:

- What local citations are, in the context of local SEO
- Why local citations matter and how they can help you
- How to successfully execute a local citation building campaign
- And more!

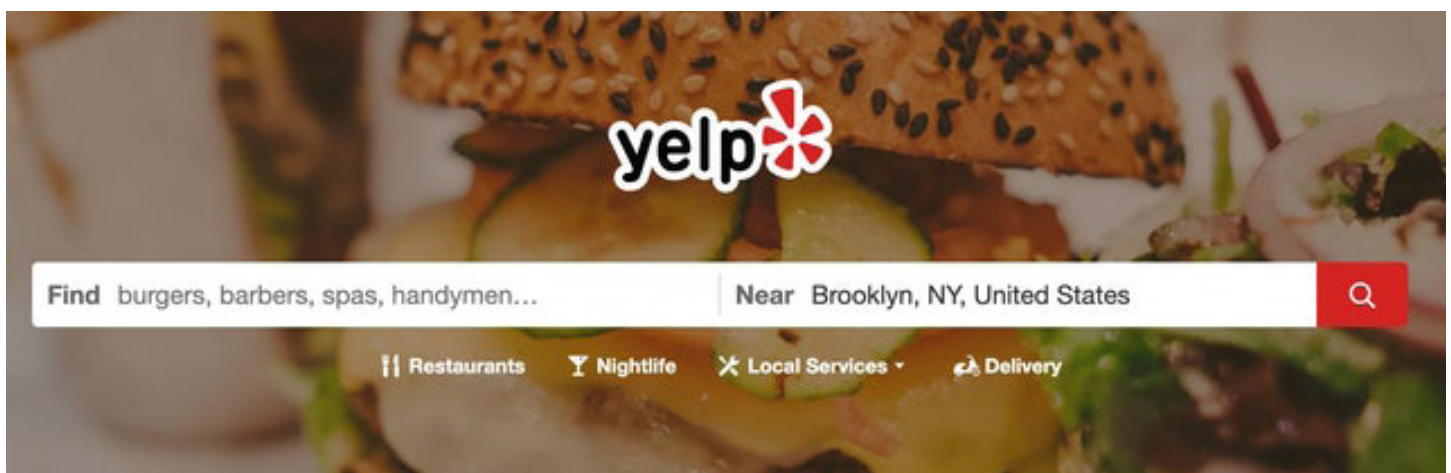
Get ready to learn everything there is to know about local citations. In fact, you might want to **bookmark this resource** and come back to it throughout your local SEO journey.

Chapter 1: What Are Local Citations?

The mere whisper of the word 'citation' may instantly throw you back to school, your head buried in a book, trying desperately to find sources for your term paper. If you're getting cold sweats already, you can relax; those aren't the types of citations we're talking about today.

What is a local citation?

In SEO, a 'local citation' refers to a business listing on a directory like Yelp, Angi, or even Facebook.



In the broader context of online marketing, a citation is a mention of your business name, business address, and business telephone number on a third-party website.

The Name, Address and Phone number part is often referred to as 'NAP', and is a particularly important part of local citation building, as we'll see later on in this guide.

Your online citations can take many forms and may include any mixture of the following:

- Company name
- Address
- Phone number
- Opening hours
- Products or services
- Images
- Videos
- Social media links

Back in 2008, marketing expert David Mihm began to notice an evolution in links for local SEO and the emergence of citations. He noted,

"In the local algorithm, links can still bring direct traffic from the people who click on them. But the difference is that these 'links' aren't always links; sometimes they're just an address and phone number associated with a particular business! In the Local algorithm, these references aren't necessarily a 'vote' for a particular business, but they serve to validate that a business exists at a particular location, and in that sense, they make a business more relevant for a particular search."

David Mihm, 2008

He called citations "the new link", which means that citations have been a part of the local search ecosystem for over a decade now.

These mentions of your business name and details can occur all around the web, including on business directories, review sites, industry-specific publications, local media outlets, social media pages, Google My Business, and even apps. Google and other search engines use citations to verify data and consumers use them to find and compare local businesses.


For local SEO, the SEO community generally agrees that the following directories are must-haves for your business citations:

- Google My Business
- Microsoft Bing Maps
- Facebook
- Yelp


Microsoft Bing 2 - little italy pizza brooklyn

little italy pizza

COVID-19 Hours or services may vary




Little Italy Pizza
876 Broadway, Brooklyn
Closed · Opens 11:30 am
✓ Dine-in · ✓ Delivery
(718) 455-9200



Little Italy Pizza
50 Fulton St, New York
Open · Closes 4:15 am
✓ Dine-in · ✓ Delivery
(212) 571-7700

Domino's Pizza | Tasty Pizza, Fresh Dough
https://www.dominos.co.uk/order_pizza/near_you
Ad Your Favorite **Pizza** Made By Hand Ready For Contact Free Delivery. Get Ordering Today! Having A Takeaway? Order A Freshly Made **Pizza** From Your Local Domino's. Order Online Today
We have fresh pizza deals and vouchers available, so make sure you check out ...
[Grab A Slice For The Game](#) · [Find Your Local Store](#) · [Latest Deals](#) · [Half and Half Pizzas](#)

Pizza Pizza | Pizza Pizza Delivery
<https://deliveroo.co.uk/pizza-pizza/delivery>
Ad Get your favourites from **Pizza Pizza** delivered. Download the app and order now! Your favourite restaurants and takeaways available on Deliveroo. Order from **Pizza Pizza**.
[We Deliver In Your Area](#) · [Restaurant Offers](#) · [From Hungry To Happy](#) · [Just What You Need](#)



Little Italy Pizza
Pizza, Italian · \$\$
[Directions](#) [Website](#) [Nearby](#)
Menu
876 Broadway, Brooklyn, NY 11206
+1 (718) 455-9200
Closed · Opens 11:30 am · Hours may vary
✓ Dine-in · ✓ Delivery
[Suggest an edit](#)
Order your favorite pizza, pasta, salad, wings and more with Little Italy Pizza located at 876 Broadway in Brooklyn, NY. Little Italy Pizza is accepting orders online for delivery and takeout.
Order online
[Grubhub](#) www.grubhub.com [Seamless](#) www.seamless.com

Once a citation has been indexed, it acts much like a link and can help to boost your local search rankings.

Most citations will remain under your control. If you submit your site to a business directory, you control what information is provided and can usually go back and edit that information as needed.

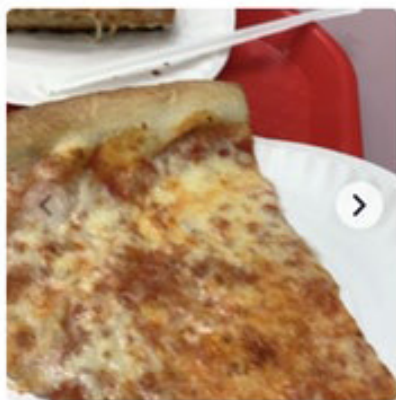
Other citations, such as those acquired as a result of local media coverage, are outside of your control. Some citations are free, others you'll need to pay for, and some may require a reciprocal link to be placed on your own site to activate it.

What types of local citations are there?

There are two distinct types of citations: structured and unstructured.

Structured Citations

This is the most common way to see NAP presented on a page, with name, address, and phone number listed next to each other, in a format consistent with the rest of the listings on the site. These come as a result of submitting business listings via specific fields in the directory submission process, so it makes sense that they show up this way.



1. Little Italy Pizza

★★★★☆ 24

\$\$ • Pizza, Italian, Sandwiches

✓ Delivery ✓ Takeout

"This is THE spot. So much so that I almost don't want to write this review but the more the merrier--right?! I typically get slices at this spot (2 for 5 on..." [more](#)

(718) 455-9200

876 Broadway

Bedford Stuyvesant

Start Order

Offers takeout and delivery

You can find structured citations most commonly on general business directories like Yelp, local directories like the Better Business Bureau for your area, and industry-specific directories like Tripadvisor.

Unstructured Citations

Far less common, but no less valuable, are citations in which the key business information isn't tightly grouped together.

Unstructured citations are so-called because they don't follow a structured listing format with data assigned to a specific field (like name, address). Instead, they can be spread across a piece of information, such as when your business is mentioned in an article by a local newspaper or blog.

This includes things like blog posts, forum threads, or press mentions, in which the story might say 'You can find StorageMart on NW 7th Street in Miami' and then later add 'Need self-storage? Just call (855) 821-0868 to find out more.'

You'll see that all the necessary information is on the same page, but not all together. This requires a little more effort for search engines to scrape, but, as mentioned before, this doesn't make them any less valuable.

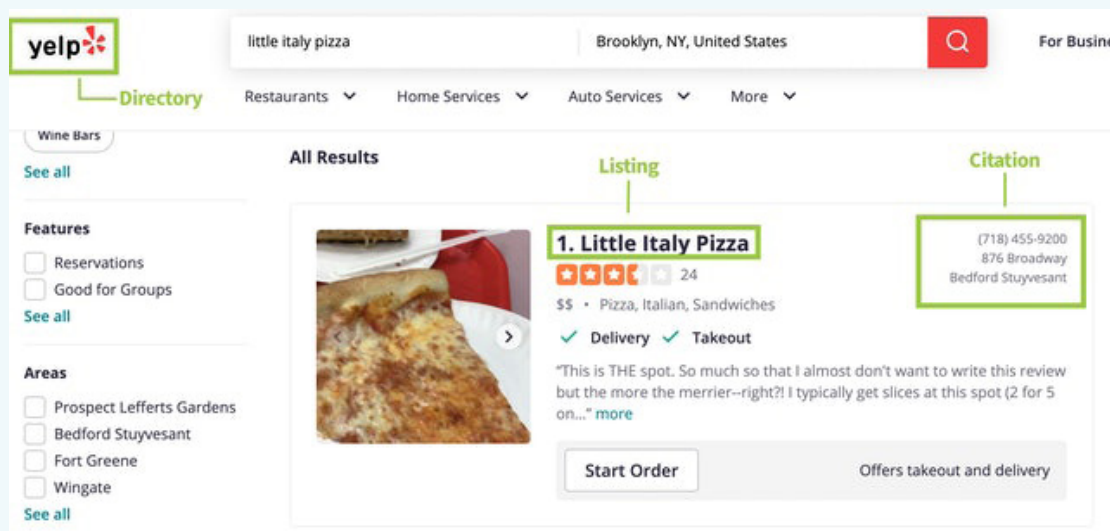
Citations, Listings, and Directories

Although the terms are sometimes conflated in local SEO, it's important to remember the differentiation between citations, listings, and directories. If nothing else, remembering these will help you through the rest of this guide, as we'll be using these terms a lot.

Citation: the data itself (e.g. StorageMart, 4920 NW 7th St Miami, FL 33126 United States, (855) 821-0868)

Listing: the page on the business directory on which the citation appears (e.g. <https://www.yelp.co.uk/biz/storagemart-miami>)

Directory: the website that houses searchable listings (e.g. Yelp)



Do citations need links to be valuable?

Citations shouldn't only be considered a local link-building exercise.

The value of citations is the mere mention of your business name. So, a citation does not need to link back to your website to be valuable.

Google identifies that your business was mentioned through the presence of your NAP info, and you get credit for this mention. The more credible mentions of your business there are online, the easier it is for Google to verify and trust your business. In turn, this should help your local rankings.

What about links? Just because citations don't need links to be valuable, it doesn't mean that links don't matter. Links are valuable, and citations that include links are even better than citations that do not include links. The point to remember is that a citation does not need to have a link in order to be valuable to your local search efforts.

Chapter 2: Why Local Citations Are Important to Local SEO

Now that you know what a local citation actually is, we can delve into exploring their local SEO benefits.

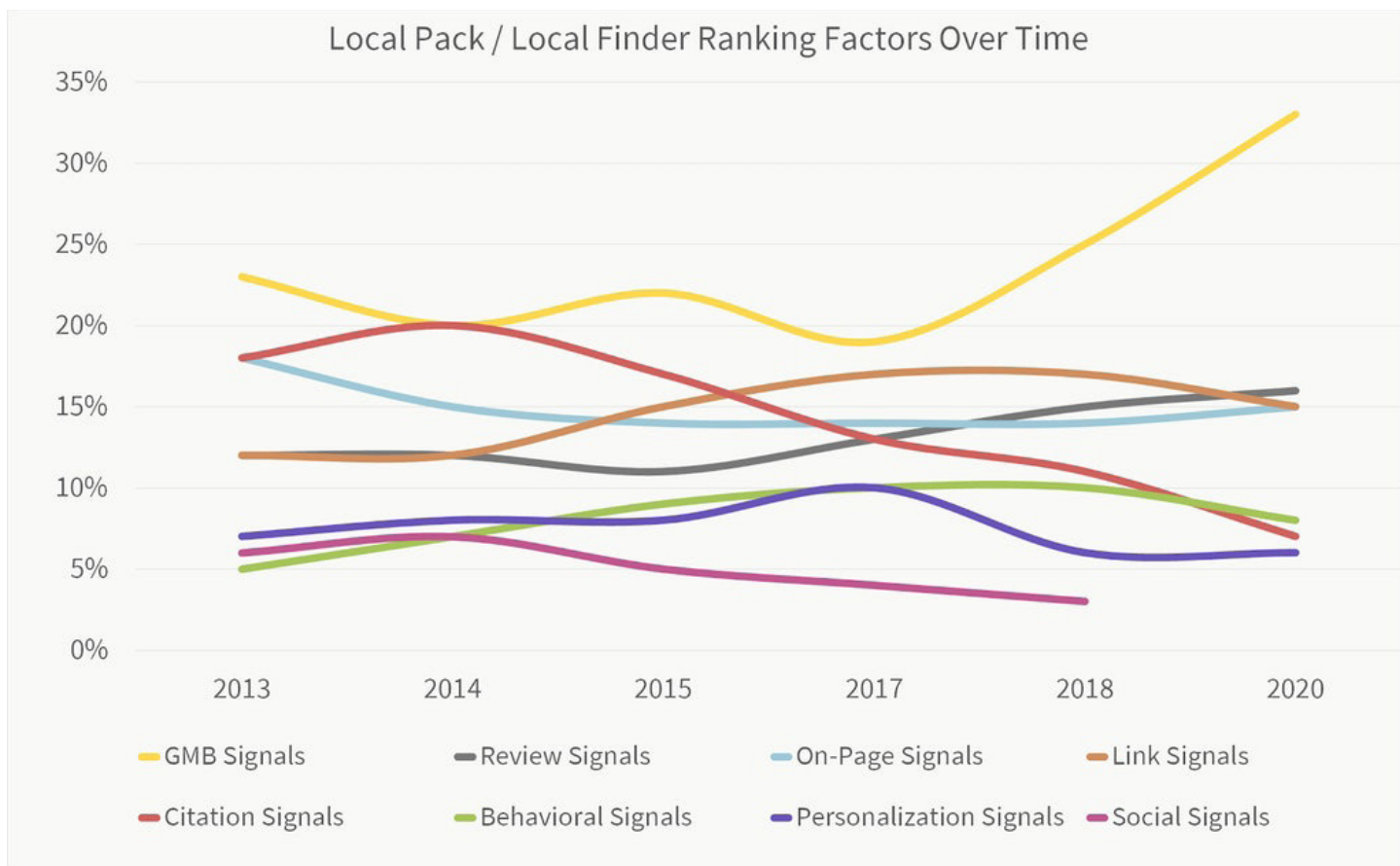
In this next chapter, we'll look at how citations can help to improve local rankings and more.

Helping to improve Local Pack and organic rankings

The number of citations a business accrues, the accuracy of the data, and the quality of the directory can all influence rankings.

How do citations impact rankings? Search engines like Google amass data about each business. If what they encounter is accurate, the search engine trusts the validity of the data, which is believed to strengthen the business's chance of ranking well. However, if the data search engines encounter is inconsistent, this trust is eroded and can negatively impact local SEO.

Though not quite as powerful a ranking factor as they once were, citation signals still have an impact on your local pack and organic rankings.



To illustrate this, the Whitespark Local Search Ranking Factors survey classes citation signals as the sixth most important ranking factor for local search positioning. And If that wasn't enough, our own research shows that 90% of local search experts consider accurate citations to be either critical or very important to local search rankings.

Getting in front of customers and earning referral traffic

Putting SEO to one side for the moment, it should be highlighted that consumers in the research phase of their buyer's journey frequently use local search citations within business listings to find products and services.

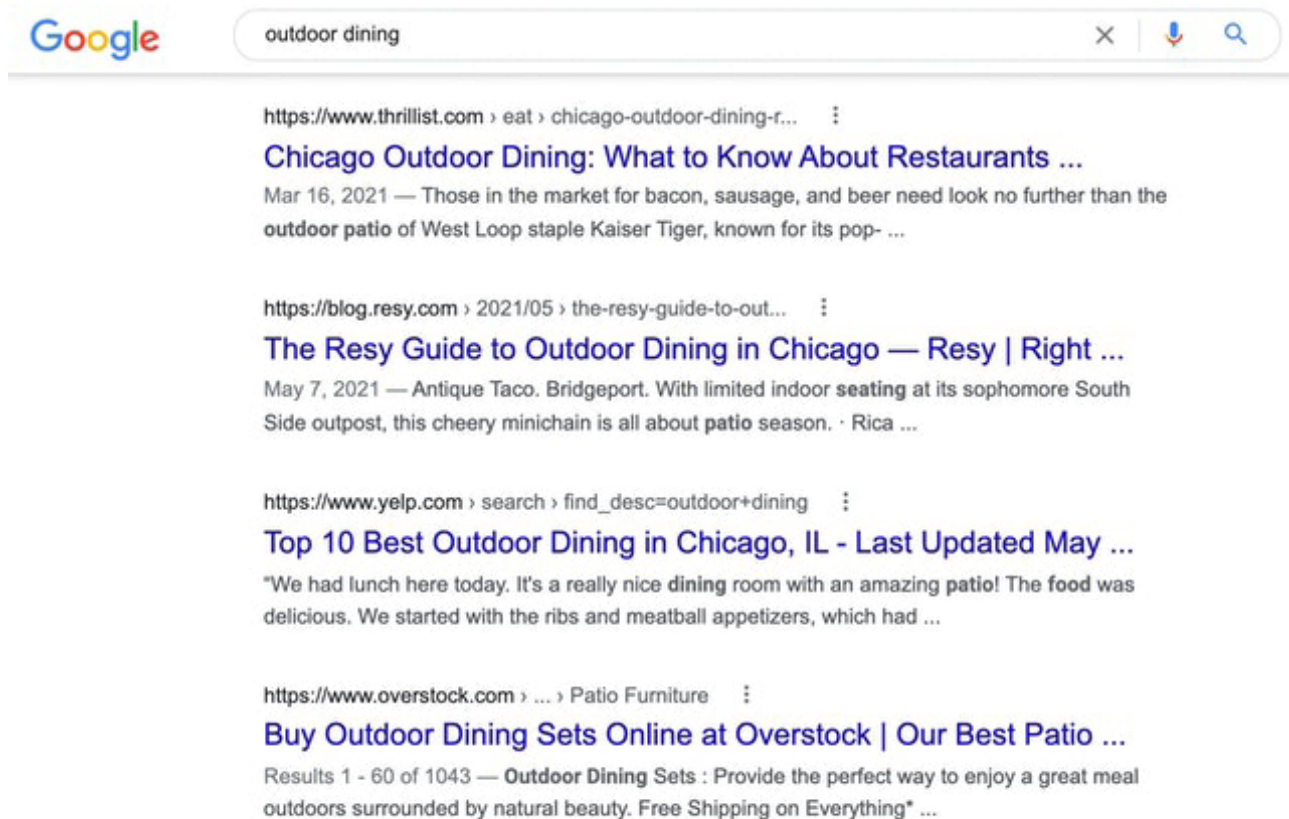
Regardless of what citations can do for your rankings and online visibility, doesn't it just make sense to get your business listed in the places people are hunting for businesses like yours?

For different needs, consumers will go to different directories. For example, consumers looking for somewhere to dine might head to Tripadvisor, those in need of a hotel will visit Booking.com. Often, searchers will go directly to these websites or apps, rather than Google, so it's important to ensure you're visible on any industry-relevant directories.

Being one click away from the first page of organic SERPs

Major directories like Yelp, Yell, and Foursquare often rank high in organic search for local queries.

Instead of trying to compete with these giants, it's worth joining them—literally. These online directories provide yet more opportunities to earn real estate on page one of Google SERPs.



Google trusts popular citation sites, as we have seen above, so these local directories often dominate the first page of Google search results when a local business search is performed. If you've ever turned to Google to find a local plumber or electrician, for example, the first page of results was more than likely dominated not by websites owned by local plumbers or electricians, but by sites like Yellow Pages or Yelp.

Many people will go directly to popular online directory sites like Yelp to search for a local business, but typically the local search is done on Google or Bing with these citation sites appearing very high in local search results.

In fact, our own local SERP click study showed that the majority of clicks on the whole first page (including PPC, local pack, and more) go to these business directories when consumers search for local businesses covering a service area. When asked why they clicked where they did, 31% said 'because it was a list of businesses'.

This gives you an idea of how important directory listings are to local business visibility.

Getting more links back to your website

We all know that getting links back to your site from trusted and authoritative websites is important for any kind of SEO, and this is where citations come in really handy.

These days, pretty much every business listings directory will contain a 'Website URL' field. The great news is that some of these sites even display these as 'dofollow' links, meaning that search engines can use them to pass link equity on to your site, further boosting your SEO.

What is a 'dofollow' link? 'Dofollow' links (the opposite of 'nofollow' links) are HTML attributes that signal to search bots that they should follow the links. If a webmaster links to your site with a dofollow link, then search engine bots and crawlers will know to follow that and search engines will factor in these links when assessing your website's online authority. Simply put, dofollow links can help your site rank better in search.

Providing more opportunities for third-party reviews

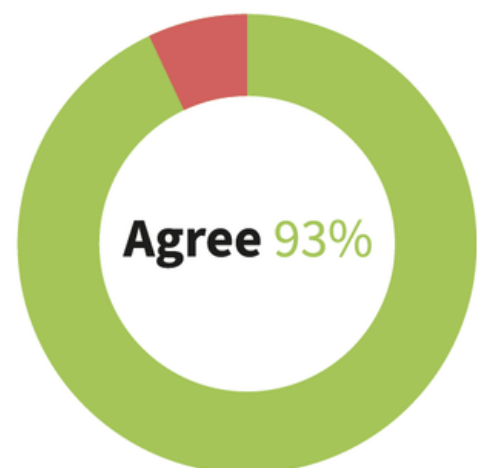
One of the three core pillars of ranking well in the Google Local pack is 'prominence' (the other two are 'relevance' and 'proximity'), and this is defined by a positive online reputation and positive mentions across the web. So it's very useful that many citation sites double up as review sites, allowing consumers to grade and describe their local business experiences.

As long as you're delivering truly great customer service, this added business listing feature will be of huge benefit, especially as the importance of review signals to your position in the local pack is growing.

What can happen if you don't manage your citations?

Unmanaged citations can confuse consumers and search engines.

“
**Finding incorrect information in
online directories frustrates me.”**
Local Citations Trust Report 2018



A jaw-dropping 93% of consumers find inaccurate directory information frustrating. So, if you're not regularly updating your information on the key directories, you could be alienating potential customers.

We'll get further into the nitty-gritty of the importance of citation accuracy in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: NAP and Data Accuracy

We've touched on NAP briefly, but in this next chapter, we'll explore why it's so important to local citations and how inaccurate data could sabotage your rankings...

What is NAP?

There are a ton of initialisms floating about in the world of digital marketing. You've got CRO, CTA, SERP, and NAP to name but a few. NAP is one that we hear a lot about, simply because it's such a fundamental part of local search. While the concept of NAP is actually fairly straightforward, there are nuances that must be observed—specifically, NAP consistency.

The mere mention of NAP consistency can cause panic because it does sound like it may be something awfully complicated. Happily, in this case, its bark is worse than its bite, but it's still worth getting this right and paying attention to the details because it's one of the core components of attaining high-profile local search visibility.

What does NAP stand for?

NAP stands for:

- Name
- Address
- Phone Number

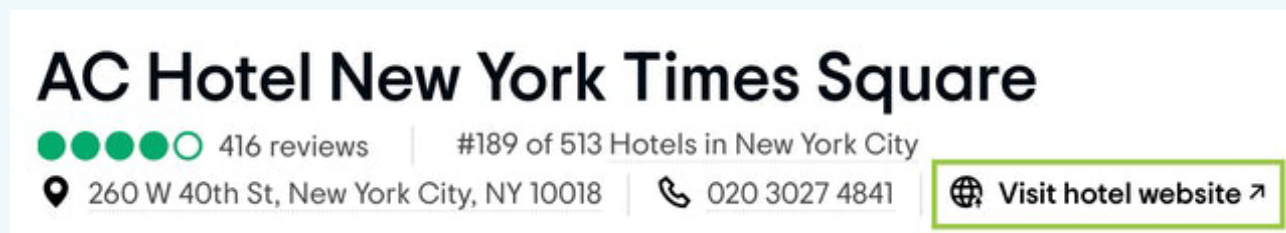
The image shows a Google Business Profile card for 'AC Hotel New York Times Square'. The card is outlined with a green border. On the right side, there are three green labels with lines pointing to specific parts of the card: 'Name' points to the hotel name, 'Address' points to the address line, and 'Phone' points to the phone number. The card itself contains the following information: the hotel name 'AC Hotel New York Times Square', a rating of 4.5 stars (represented by four full green stars and one half-filled star) with '416 reviews', a ranking of '#193 of 514 Hotels in New York City', the address '260 W 40th St, New York City, NY 10018', the phone number '020 3027 4841', and a link to the hotel's website with a globe icon and an external link symbol.

Name	Address	Phone
AC Hotel New York Times Square	260 W 40th St, New York City, NY 10018	020 3027 4841

These three nuggets of information are important details in their own right, but add them together and their accuracy (or lack thereof) can be either the reason a customer walks into your store or the cause of them getting lost, being frustrated, wasting their time or even visiting a competitor.

We sometimes refer to citations that don't include all three parts of NAP as a "partial citation".

Where does my website come into citations? You'll sometimes also hear people talk about a NAPW or a UNAP citation as well. The W refers to 'website', and the U refers to 'URL'. If your website URL is included in the citation, it has additional value. This is because it provides an extra data point that helps the search engines connect the citation to your business, so some people like to include it in the acronym.



As we'll see, NAP is an important ranking factor, but you may well find that you have lots of NAP listings that you haven't actually set out to build. That's because NAP listings occur naturally, simply as a result of you going about your regular marketing activities.

If you open a Facebook business page to improve your social visibility and engagement, for example, by filling in the profile details requested you've created a NAP citation.

If you create an event and publish details of that event online, perhaps so customers can buy tickets or for local residents to attend at your place of business, you've inadvertently added another NAP citation to your collection.

Likewise, if you exhibit at a conference and that conference publishes exhibitor information online, or if you're referenced in a local blog, newspaper, or magazine article, or if you add your site to an industry directory in order to direct niche traffic to your business, you've racked up yet more NAP mentions without even trying.

Does NAP include mentions on your website?

We've established that NAP mentions can take many forms and occur in a whole host of different spaces, from social media profiles to directories, newspaper articles to reviews, but these days NAP consistency also includes your website. This is a place where you will naturally reference your business name, provide customers with your phone number or give directions to your store. Whether they are clustered together in the same part of the page or split up on the page, that information still counts as a NAP citation.

With that said, you'll need to be vigilant about how you reference your name, address, and phone number on your own site just as you do when building citations or providing this basic contact information elsewhere.

How can NAP data become inaccurate?

It's easy to fall into the habit of thinking of NAP as a purposeful thing you do when you're specifically seeking to build citations. In fact, it's something that often occurs very naturally in the course of a marketing action such as writing an article or creating a new web page.

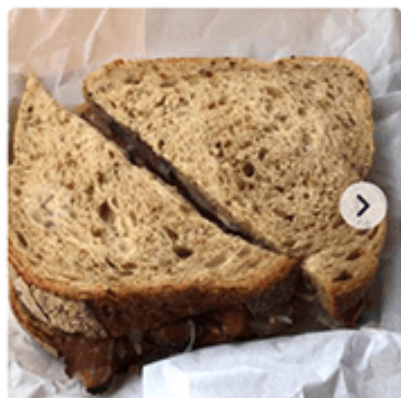
For that reason, it's easy to be caught unawares and fall into the trap of neglecting NAP consistency simply because you're more concerned with the actual task at hand, not the NAP you've generated as a byproduct of your focus at the time.

Another reason that NAP consistency can be less than perfect is that not all NAP occurrences follow the same format. Because you may find yourself inputting the NAP data in a range of different ways for a whole host of different reasons in a multitude of different locations, consistency can be hard to maintain. This is especially true if you're completing a social media profile one minute and purchasing a directory listing the next.

Likewise, you won't always be the one physically creating the citation. It may be that you're interviewed by a local reporter, for example, and in their article, they truncate the name of your street or neglect to give the zip code. They may use a colloquial form of your company name or not use LLC alongside your company name for style purposes.

You may also have other people, such as your local SEO agency, working on your behalf that inputs your NAP data slightly differently to you, creating inconsistencies over time.

Here's an example of a Brighton-based business that moved locations but didn't update its info on key directories:



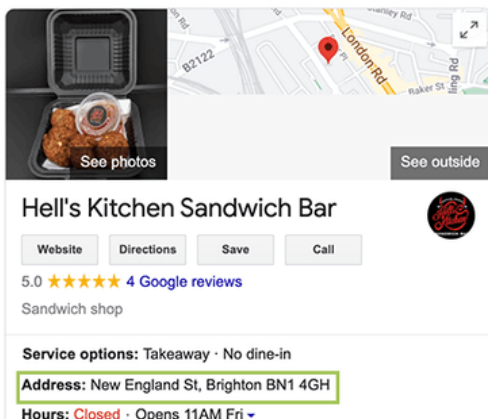
1. Hells Kitchen



£ • Delis, Coffee & Tea Shops, Sandwiches

"The salads here are TOP. Get the mix of everything - you won't regret it. It's a huge portion and really delicious. The gluttony sandwich is also..." [more](#)

01273 604925
4 Gardner Street



The top image shows the sandwich bar's old address on Yelp, meanwhile Google My Business presents the right address. This is going to confuse searchers and search engines.

What are duplicate listings?

Duplicate listings are easy to accidentally create but can derail your local SEO and local citation-building efforts equally as easily, so it's important to understand how they come about.

A duplicate business listing occurs when more than one listing is present for the same business on an industry directory site, general directory site, or similar platform such as Google My Business.

Although the details under each listing may be different, if the listing relates to the same business, then it is considered a duplicate.

Let's say, for example, that you run a restaurant and have both dine-in and takeout options. If you'd created a business listing on Yelp for your restaurant and then created a second Yelp listing for your takeout menu, you'd essentially be creating a duplicate business listing.

Listings like this can be created in the hopes of gaining more visibility, but actually, they can have pretty serious consequences for your overall local SEO.

Think duplicate listings might be an issue for you? Learn how to find and fix duplicate listings.

How can duplicate business listings occur?

Even if you haven't intentionally set out to create a duplicate business listing, you may well find that several have sprung up over time anyway. There are lots of reasons why this may be the case:

Accidental addition

You, a co-worker, or an agency working on your behalf may inadvertently create a citation on a site where you already have a listing. This can happen very easily if you have been building citations for a while and have lost track of sites where a business listing already exists or if you bring someone new on board who doesn't have a complete list of current business listings.

To avoid the curse of accidental addition, make sure you keep track of all existing listings in a location that every team member has access to.

Aggregation

Some listing sites aggregate their data from multiple sources. If you have inconsistent NAP, it may be that they find several different listings, each with slightly different data, all of which are then imported separately, compounding your duplicate business listing problem.

Loss of login details

Business information naturally changes over time. Your business phone number may change, for example, or you could move to a new address. If you no longer have access to the original listing, perhaps because it was set up by an old agency or owned by a former employee, you may just go ahead and create a new one instead. Securely storing your login information for all directories your business is present on is advisable to avoid this common faux pas.

Attempting to boost SEO

SEO is in a constant state of evolution so it is entirely possible that an agency you worked with in the past would have created multiple business listings on the same directories because they believed it was a way to gain better search engine rankings.

This definitely isn't the case today, so if you think an agency you worked with may have created duplicate listings on your behalf, be sure to monitor where your business is present online and remove any copies.

How accurate do NAP citations need to be?

At Cogent, we are frequently asked questions about how to format your business address online.

Ave vs avenue, St vs street, no. vs #. Does it really make a difference?

Things have changed a lot in the past few years and, fortunately, search engines are now smart enough to understand abbreviations (or slight variations) and to associate them with their non-abbreviated counterparts.

If this wasn't the case, then there would likely be tons of duplicate listings for every single business, a result of even the smallest of inconsistencies in formatting.

Differences such as "JSC" vs "J.S.C." do not affect in any way Google's ability to recognize these as the same thing for the purposes of business data clustering.

So, when worrying about NAP, try to focus on the bigger details.

Why is accurate and consistent NAP data important?

The benchmark Local Search Ranking Factors survey lists citations (which includes NAP consistency) as a local pack ranking factor. It cites the presence of NAP within both on-page signals as its fourth most important ranking factor and NAP consistency within the number five rated citation signals.

NAP consistency is important not just to search engine ranking algorithms; it can also have a direct impact on consumer perception of your business and dictate whether they have a positive or negative experience of your brand. So, while NAP itself is simple enough, there is much more going on under the surface to ensure your local search presence is optimized and working well for your business.

Inaccurate data can harm your SEO and rankings

As we've mentioned, NAP is a ranking factor; it contributes to on-page signals and citation signals, both of which contribute to a strong presence in the local pack.

Our own Cogent research supports this further, with our findings showing that local businesses ranking in the top 10 of local pack rankings all have an average of 81 citations. Those ranking in the top spot have an average of 86 citations, while the business ranked 10th had an average of 75—suggesting that the more citations containing NAP you're able to build, the better your local rank position.

It's also known that Google (and other search engines) use local citations to gather information about a business. Google essentially wants to amass as much data as it can about a business to understand it. This means that the number of local citations it can find, the accuracy and consistency of that data, and the quality of where that data is pulled from all help the search engine to build a picture.

If NAP consistency is apparent across the board, it's taken as a signal that the information is accurate—meaning that Google can confidently provide that same info to search users. On the flip side, a lack of NAP consistency is a red flag, eating away at trust and hampering rankings.

Consumers distrust businesses with incorrect or inconsistent listings information

It's impossible to over-emphasize just how important NAP consistency is for consumer trust. More than 9 in 10 consumers in our 2018 Local Citations Trust Report say they are frustrated by incorrect information in online directories.

This shouldn't come as much of a surprise, especially when you factor in that local searches tend to be driven by high intent. Figures from Think With Google show that 88% of consumers who use their smartphone to conduct a local search will visit a local store within seven days.

Nine in ten consumers also say they look up the address of a business online before their first visit. As a brand, you need NAP consistency to ensure that the address they are finding is correct. If that consumer finds two different addresses, or inconsistencies such as a different zip code, they won't know where to go and this could lead to them abandoning their planned visit before they even set off, costing you a sale you never knew was in the balance.

Likewise, consumers who struggle to find a business when they arrive due to incorrect or inconsistent NAP data are increasingly likely to give up and go elsewhere. Almost half say they'd stop trying and around a third would go to a competitor. The potential revenue lost makes NAP inconsistency incredibly costly.

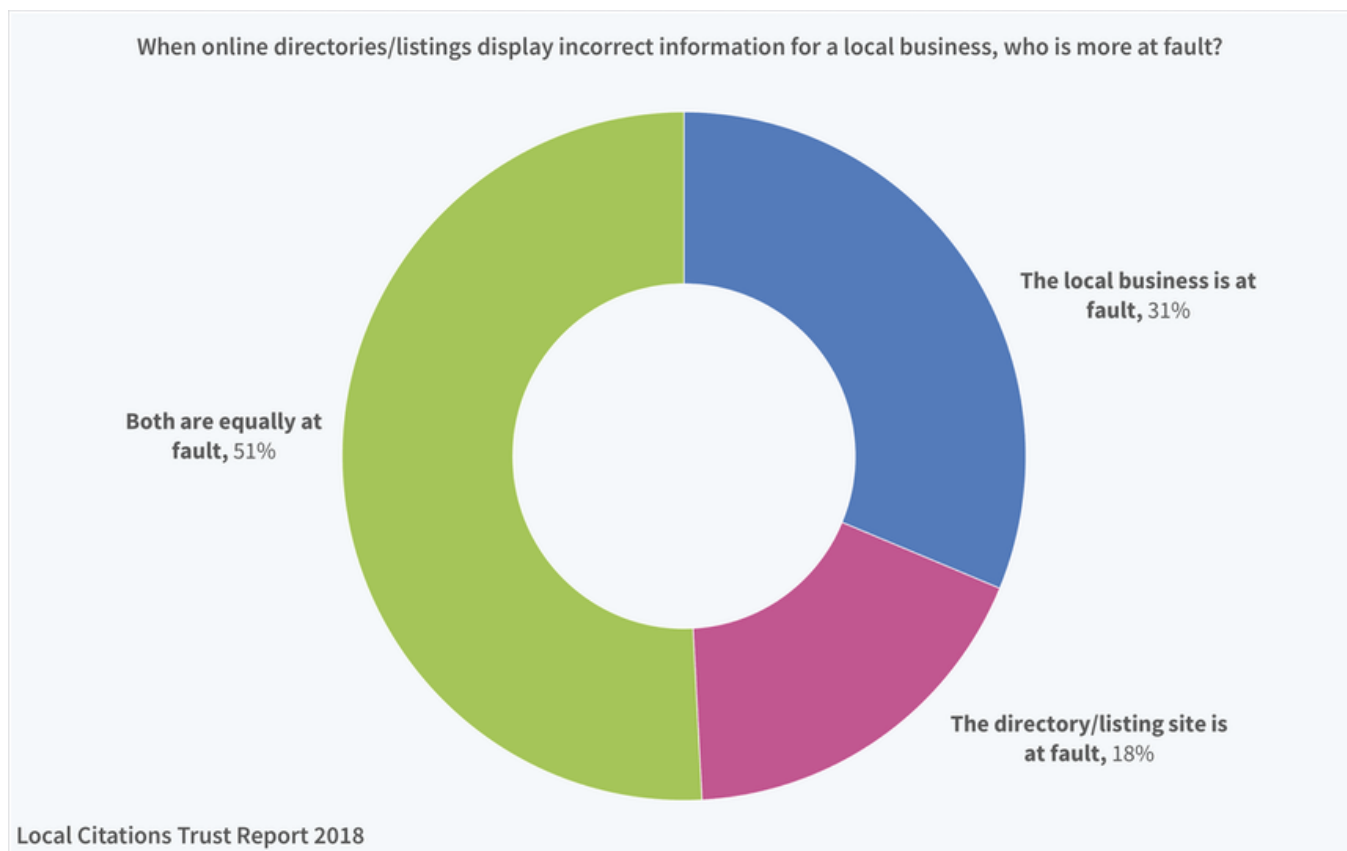
The more consistent your NAP, the clearer it is for consumers and the more trustworthy you appear.

NAP consistency sets the tone for the consumer journey and path to purchase

Google research data concludes that 96% of users turn to their smartphones when they have a need to get something done, with 87% of those consumers making a search engine their first port of call. This makes search results the first step on what you hope will be a path to purchase.

A consumer is just as likely to find a directory listing, a Google My Business profile, a favorable article, or a social media link as they are your website. These are all discovery portals, making it even more important your NAP is consistent and up to date across the web.

Just as having consistent and accurate NAP moves the consumer along the purchase journey, incorrect data can lead them to fall off that path. Plus our local citation trust report found that consumers place the onus for correcting incorrect information on the local business, not the directory site displaying the wrong details.



NAP consistency results in more and better referral traffic to the site

So, we've seen that NAP consistency is critical to the consumer journey and can help a local consumer transition from search user to your customer—but only if that information is consistent and accurate.

We've also seen that NAP data can be an important part of local SEO rankings. It allows Google to build a credible picture of your business, verify what it thinks it knows about you and confidently return your business information within relevant searches to local search users. It can only do this if your NAP is consistent. The more consistent you can be, the more you help the search engines trust your business.

Local consumers additionally appear to be a somewhat unforgiving bunch when it comes to spotting flaws; they expect the local business to get it right and fix mistakes when NAP is wrong.

It follows, then, that there's another layer to this. Regardless of whether your NAP appears in a blog post, a review, a Facebook profile, or within the Yellow Pages, it needs to be accurate to garner search visibility (leading to website visitors or brick-and-mortar visits) and to usher the consumer along the path to purchase. That will often involve visiting your website. If your NAP is inconsistent or inaccurate, you'll restrict your local ranking positions and put local consumers off visiting your site.

The bottom line is that the more consistent your NAP, the more referring traffic you'll get to your site, whether as a result of a clickthrough from a search results page or from a trusted third-party site displaying accurate business information.

Accurate NAP makes the likelihood of appearing in voice search higher

Google says that the speed at which consumers have adopted voice search has been faster than the adoption of any type of technology since the smartphone.

Why does this matter? Voice search and mobile search are very closely linked, with many smartphone users turning to voice search for hands-free moments, such as when driving and in need of directions to a local business.

According to the 2016 Kleiner Perkins State of the Internet Report, 22% of people use voice search for finding local information. In its 2019 voice search study, SEMrush concluded that 80% of answers returned by voice search were taken from the top three organic search results. With NAP a known local SEO ranking factor, having accurate NAP makes it much more likely that you'll appear for voice searches.

In a piece on voice technology strategy, Google's Jared Belsky underlines exactly why this is so vital, saying "Smart speakers give one answer at a time, so if you're not first, you're last."

What other business data should you keep consistent?

In addition to NAP consistency, there are several other items of business data to keep consistent. Your website URL is an obvious one along with your main contact email address.

Product and service data should also be consistent across your online presence. If a product or service has been omitted from your Google My Business profile, for example, you could be missing out on leads or sales.

Likewise, if a product or service you have listed is discontinued, it should be removed from your online presence as soon as possible to avoid customer frustration and distrust.

Many consumers turn to social media to find local businesses or source business information, so ensure that your profiles are all consistent, too. If you have older, outdated profiles that are no longer in use, remove those links and replace them with your active social media handles.

Chapter 4: How to Build Citations for Local Businesses

We've established what citations are, why they're important, and covered the likes of NAP. In this section, we'll move on to talking about the process of "citation building", explaining how to build citations and business listings across the web for local SEO purposes.

What is local citation building?

Local citation building is the process of creating and managing business listings online. If a 'citation' is a mention of your business online, then building local citations is the act of producing more mentions of your business across the web.

Everything you see in the screenshot below is a result of local citation building, from the Google My Business profile to the third-party directories and review sites.

The image displays a collage of business citations and a Google My Business profile for 'Little Italy M & O Pizza'.

Citations (Left Side):

- grubhub.com**: Little Italy M & O Pizza Delivery Menu | Order Online | 876 ...
Order delivery or pickup from Little Italy M & O Pizza in Brooklyn! View Little Italy M & O Pizza's May 2021 deals and menus. Support your local restaurants with ...
★★★★★ Rating: 4.7 · 985 votes · Price range: \$
- yelp.com**: LITTLE ITALY PIZZA - 27 Photos & 24 Reviews - Pizza - 876 ...
Delivery & Pickup Options - 24 reviews of Little Italy Pizza "The food is really good here, and ...
You haven't enjoyed Brooklyn unless you've had pizza here!
★★★★★ Rating: 3.5 · 24 reviews · Price range: \$11-30
- littleitalypizzabrooklyn.com**: Little Italy Pizza & Restaurant - Brooklyn - Menu & Hours ...
Get 5% off your pizza delivery order - View the menu, hours, address, and photos for Little Italy Pizza & Restaurant in Brooklyn, NY. Order online for delivery or ...
- opentable.com**: Little Italy Pizza Restaurant - Brooklyn, NY | OpenTable
Get menu, photos and location information for Little Italy Pizza in Brooklyn, NY. Or book now at one of our other 33835 great restaurants in Brooklyn.
- delivery.com**: Little Italy Pizza, Brooklyn Food Menu | Order Now
Appetizers · Buffalo Wings (8) · Mozzarella Sticks (6) · Chicken Fingers (5) · Popular · Chicken Fingers (5) with Fries · Knish · Knish with Cheese · Beef Patties · Beef ...
★★★★★ Rating: 4 · 95 reviews · Price range: \$

Google My Business Profile (Right Side):

- Little Italy Pizza & Restaurant**
- 4.1 ★★★★★ 191 Google reviews
- \$ · Pizza restaurant
- Buttons: ORDER PICKUP, ORDER DELIVERY
- Description: Low-key storefront dispensing thin-crust pies, pasta, burgers & subs for dine-in or delivery.
- Service options: Curbside pickup · No-contact delivery
- Ad: Order Seamless Food Delivery
Little Italy M and O Pizza - Delivered by Seamless
Order Now · seamless.com
- Address: 876 Broadway, Brooklyn, NY 11206
- Hours: Opens soon · 11:30AM · More hours
- Health & safety: Mask required · Staff required to disinfect surfaces between visits · More details

How many local citations do you need for better local SEO?

This is a question many local business owners ask, and luckily the answer is simple: as many as possible, but only on quality sites. The more high-quality local citations your business can build, the better.

What do we mean by ‘high-quality local citations’? Directories specific to your niche and local area can be impactful, but the website’s Domain Authority is, as always, a good barometer for quality. That’s not to say you shouldn’t consider upping the number of lower-quality listings (the kinds of relatively unknown listings sites that are rarely visited by consumers) if you have the budget and time, as these all add to your overall authority, just don’t expect to get any leads or calls through them.

When you create relevant, credible, and localized citations on local online directory websites, you increase the odds of your site ranking higher in local searches—which can help generate more leads and ultimately, more sales.

This will require a serious time investment as it’s no quick job to build dozens of accurate citations on good-quality sites. A service like Cogent Citation Builder can help make the process a little easier.

There are no quick fixes, though, and citation building should be seen as an ongoing task. The more consistent you are with local citation building and NAP information, the more you provide search engines with credible backlinks and data to rank you with.

Wondering what the average number of citations is for a business in your industry, or how citations impact local rankings? Take a look at our wide-ranging SEO Citations Study, which covers 26 industries and can help you benchmark your business against competitors and develop your citations strategy.

How to build local citations

Well, we've covered the 'what' and the 'why', so let's get to the 'how'. There are three approaches to practicing local citations SEO, each with their own strengths and weaknesses.

Whether you're manually building citations yourself, using a citation building tool or service or hiring a local SEO agency to take over the building and management of your citations, one or more of these approaches will be used:

- **Direct Citations Submissions:** This is where someone enters data into the business listings site directly by hand. With this approach, you can reach some of the more niche directories, and also you have the added benefit of a human eye, leading to fewer submission errors. The downside is that if you aim to do this yourself, it could take you a long time.
- **Automated Citations Submissions:** As the name suggests, this approach uses a citation building system or API to automatically fill in submission forms on citation sites. Unfortunately, unlike manual submissions, this often leads to errors, and automated systems also don't have as wide a reach as you would if the citations were built directly.
- **Data Aggregator Submissions:** This is a far more accurate way of automatically building citations across the most important business listings websites and online directories. There are three big data aggregators in the USA: Neustar Localeze, Foursquare, and Data Axle. Each of these has a widely used, automated process for submitting citations to their trusted partners.

Let's go through these processes, one by one.

Manually submitting citations to directories

If you're building citations manually, you'll need to know how to create new listings without risk of duplicates or inconsistent NAP.

In this next section, I'll share a simple step-by-step process that will guide you to submit citations manually.

Check for existing local citations

Before you can start to find new business listings, you'll need to identify which citations you already have. A tool such as Local Pulse marketing's Citation Tracker is invaluable here. Not only does this make lighter work of trawling the web to find all existing citations for your business, but it also makes it much easier to uncover incorrect information and inconsistencies in NAP, and then take suitable remedial action.

If you're on a budget and only need to check out the top local citation sites, you can use our free Local Listings Health Scanner tool to get a local citation health score across the top 15 directories.

Presenting consistent, accurate information is crucial—incomplete or incorrect details can lead to a loss of trust, not just from the search engines who rely on the data for ranking purposes, but from consumers, too.

We grilled a panel of consumers about local listings and local citations to find out if they're as important from a sales perspective as they are from a search one. 93% of consumers said incorrect business directory information frustrates them, 80% will lose trust and 68% would stop using a local business entirely if they found incorrect information in online directories.

Find good quality, popular local citation sources

Now we've answered the question, "what is local citation building?" it pays to go a little further and ask, "what does good local citation building look like?"

As with links, there is an element of quality control to keep in mind. You should initially focus on building citations from sites that are either widely used (such as Yelp or Yellow Pages) or very relevant to your industry or location.

Research shows that quality and relevance of citations are more important than quantity, so it's worthwhile hunting out better quality sites where possible. The same study finds that 64% of local SEO experts say niche and industry directories offer the best measure of authority for structured citations, with 18% saying national directories offer the most authority.

There are lots of good quality, highly trusted citation sites—but there are also plenty of poor online directories that have no credibility with the search engines. Building local citations on those sites could actually harm your local search rankings.

Here are several ways to sort through the large pool of potential targets and hone in on better quality options.

Perform competitor research to identify new opportunities

If you've carried out any form of SEO prior to learning about local citation building, it's likely you'll have done some competitor link research to find out what sites are linking to rivals and giving them a search engine edge. This same mindset should be carried across to local citation building.

Knowing how to find new citations can actually be as simple as discovering which sites your competitors are on that you aren't. A tool like Citation Tracker is, again, useful here, as it can automate the process of spying on competitors, compiling a citation report, and then identifying targeted niche and local citation opportunities to explore.

Download Moz's toolbar for Chrome

The Moz toolbar allows you to see the Page Authority, Domain Authority, and Spam Score for any site you visit. When you start to build citations using this tool, look for sites with a high Page Authority and Domain Authority number and a low Spam Score.

Do a Google search

You can use Google to aid with citation building for local SEO. Simply perform a search for relevant business types. The citation sites that show up on the first few pages of the search results are generally good quality online directories that you should strive to get your business listed on.

In addition to the main business data platforms such as Yelp, look for industry-specific or geographically relevant platforms. This should include sources such as a local chamber of commerce listings, trade bodies, and professional member associations.

Once those two avenues have been exhausted, turn your attention to the web in general. You can build good-quality citations across a range of website types, including blogs, government databases, apps, maps, and local media outlets.

Use online resources

Cogent conducts extensive research and has created a number of resources which showcase top-quality citation sites. You can use these lists to build citations, safe in the knowledge they will help rather than hinder your local SEO rankings.

Our top 50 online directory sites for the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia is a good place to start. These lists detail the domain authority for each of the best citation sites in these areas.

In addition to “general” online business directories, there are niche/industry-specific citation sites that you should get your business listed on if appropriate. We’ve collated a list of more than one thousand citation sites by niche, all of which have been vetted for quality.

Here you’ll find popular citation sites for a variety of industries like insurance, healthcare, real estate, and restaurants. If your industry has quality citation sites online, make sure your business is listed correctly on as many of those niche online directories as well.

Submit local citations manually

If time is on your side, you can submit to directories one by one. It’s pretty mundane as tasks go, but it’s not difficult!

All you need to do is search for your business name on the relevant sites and, if it's already there, make sure the information is accurate. If it isn't accurate, look for an option to claim the listing (most sites have this) and correct the errors. If your business isn't already present, select the option to create a new listing.

The screenshot shows the BBB website's header with the logo and navigation links. Below the header is a search bar with fields for 'Find' (businesses, charities, category), 'Near' (city, state or zip), and a country dropdown set to 'US'. A 'Search' button is to the right. The main content area is titled 'Add a Business to the BBB Directory'. It includes a paragraph explaining the purpose of the form, a 'PLEASE NOTE' section, and two buttons: 'File a complaint' and 'Start a customer review'. Below these is a link to 'Our Privacy Policy'. The form itself has two radio buttons: 'Are you a customer?' (unselected) and 'Are you the business owner or manager?' (selected). There are two input fields: 'Business Name*' and 'Address 1'. To the right of the form are two sidebars. The top sidebar is titled 'Consumers' and contains text about educational resources and a 'Consumer Resources' button. The bottom sidebar is titled 'Business Owners' and contains text about building a better business, a link to 'How to Get BBB Accredited', and a link to 'Contact Your Local BBB'.

Better Business Bureau®

Set my location

Find businesses, charities, category

Near city, state or zip

US

Search

Add a Business to the BBB Directory

Are we missing a business in the BBB Directory? To start the process of creating a new BBB Business Profile, please provide some basic information about the business using the form below. Please include the name and location of the business to help BBB identify and add the correct business.

PLEASE NOTE: This form is only for asking BBB to create a new BBB Business Profile.

[File a complaint](#) [Start a customer review](#)

[Our Privacy Policy](#)

☐ Are you a customer? ☒ Are you the business owner or manager?

Business Name*

Address 1

Consumers

BBB provides educational resources and programs to empower and protect consumers. Click the button below to explore BBB resources.

[Consumer Resources](#)

Business Owners

Let BBB help you Build a Better Business. Help us expand our directory. Add your business to our listings and explore the value of becoming a BBB Accredited Business.

[How to Get BBB Accredited](#)

[Contact Your Local BBB](#)

Even if your business is present and accurate, you still might want to claim the listing. This way, you know you've got full control over your information and you can add more information about your business. For example, Yelp lets you add photos and tons of other details once you've claimed the profile.

Claiming a listing online verifies that you're the owner of a valid business and are authorized to maintain its presence on the web. Each online local business index has its own claiming process with unique steps to verify your listing, but we'll aim to provide a general picture of what you can expect to experience.

Most places will first ask whether your business already exists in their index. Don't be surprised if it does, even if you've never created a listing there!

"Where did that listing come from?" Unless your business opened its doors today, chances are there's some record of its existence on the web. This could be a result of user-generated content, data aggregators, or if you've worked with an agency in the past.

In general, you'll be prompted to enter your business name or phone number to discover any existing listings.

Next, you'll need to review any existing information, fix incorrect information, and provide any new or missing information about your business. Remember: You want your NAP to be as consistent as possible on every listing.

Once you've filled out your business's information, the verification process starts. This typically happens in one of three ways:

1. Via an immediate phone call, during which you'll verify using a pin number
2. Via a postal mail postcard and pin number verification
3. Via an email in which you'll be clicking on a verification link (usually you'll need an email address that matches the domain URL)

If you're verifying via postcard, alert all staff members who retrieve mail to be on the lookout for the postcard. These typically arrive within a couple of weeks but are rather plain and small. Keep an eye out as you don't want them to get lost.

The time between completing verification and seeing your listing appear online varies widely from platform to platform. In some cases, your listing will be live in a matter of days or even minutes, but other indexes have a lengthy manual review process, meaning that it can take several months for your listing to be approved for publication. While you wait, don't make any further changes to your submitted listings. This will help you avoid additional delays.

In certain indexes (such as Google My Business), any future changes to core data such as the business name or phone number may trigger the need to re-verify. However, you can typically edit fields like business descriptions and photos without having to go through the verification process again.

Before we wrap up this section, if you are choosing to manual manage your citations, there are a couple of dos and don'ts you ought to be aware of:

- **DO** keep track of your listings and their statuses in a detailed spreadsheet that includes dates submitted, email/password use, status, links, and anything else you need to know to quickly find the listing again whenever necessary.
- **DON'T** enter into an arrangement in which someone is claiming your listings under any account other than the account of the business. For example, Jim's Plumbing Co. shouldn't authorize ABC Marketing, Inc. to claim the plumber's Google My Business listing under info@abcmarketing.com's Google account. Should the relationship between the plumber and the agency end, Jim may find that he doesn't control his local business listings and can't manage them—a situation that should be avoided at all costs.
- **DON'T** confuse claiming with owning. While claiming validates that you have the right to manage a listing on a platform, you don't own that listing—the platform owns it. They maintain the right to take the listing down if they feel it violates guidelines, filter out reviews if they're deemed untrustworthy, and approve public/community edits to the listing's data, all without the business owner's approval.

Optimize your local citations

While local citation building can begin and end with just spreading your NAP across the web, it's often beneficial to build out and optimize your business listings. Having optimized, detailed listings can have fringe benefits like converting searchers.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when optimizing your listings:

Descriptions

Business descriptions can help search engines better understand your business. Plus, if a potential customer stumbles upon your listing, you'll want to make sure you're putting your best foot forward. Use this space to accurately describe your listing without too much sales talk or keyword-stuffing.

AC Hotel New York Times Square

Special offer

COVID-19

About

Location

Reviews

About

4.0

Very good

416 reviews

#190 of 514 hotels in New York City

●●●●●

Location

●●●●●

Cleanliness

●●●●○

Service

●●●●○

Value

Travellers' Choice

AC Hotel by Marriott New York Times Square reflects the soul of the city that never sleeps. We offer a unique combination of quality, timeless European design, comfort and true authenticity at our NYC Times Square hotel. It's a whole new way to travel. Our 290 stylish guest rooms purposeful design strip away the unnecessary drawing your attention to the beauty in the essentials.

Property amenities

Paid public parking nearby

Wifi

Fitness Centre with Gym / Workout Room

Bar / lounge

Bicycle rental

Children Activities (Kid / Family Friendly)

Business Centre with Internet Access

Banquet room

Show more

Room features

Air conditioning

Desk

Housekeeping

Safe

Refrigerator

Flatscreen TV

Complimentary toiletries

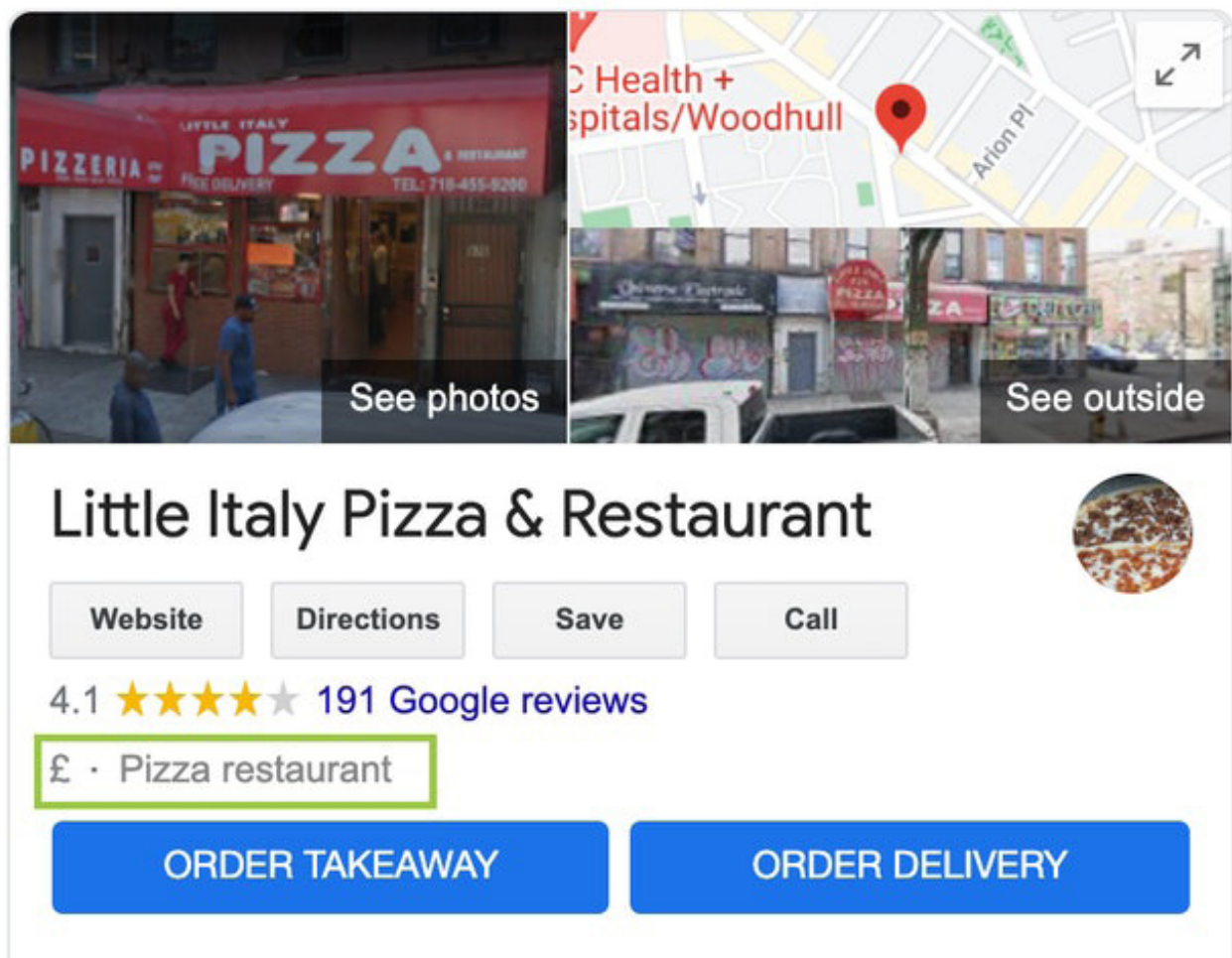
Hair dryer

Website Link

If you're a multi-location business or a business with many different service offerings, you may want to use your website link space to direct readers and search engines to specific pages. This is especially important for businesses operating out of multiple locations, to ensure search engines don't get confused. For example, a business listing for Home Depot in Florida should link to that specific store's website page.

Business Category

Some citations, such as Google My Business, allow you to select primary and secondary categories. This is another good opportunity to help search engines associate your business with the right search queries and areas of expertise. To make sure you're using the right categories, you can cross-reference with what your competitors are using.



Photos

Adding photos of your business can help you gain visibility and help with customer conversion rates, too. Try to share a variety of photos to showcase your business. For example, exterior, interior, and product photos.



Little Italy Pizza & Restaurant

All

Food & drink

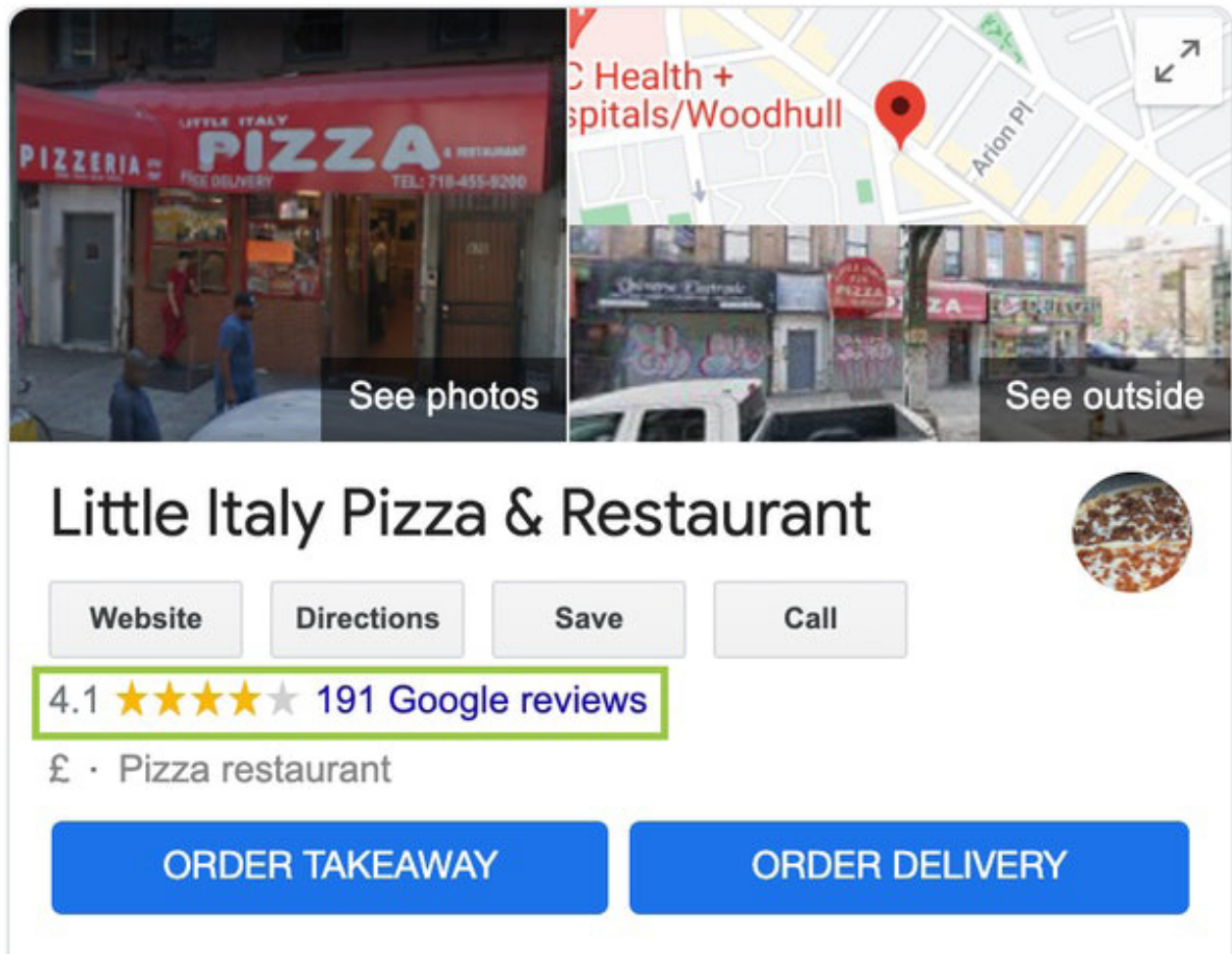
Take-out

By owner



Reviews

Online reviews are a known ranking factor. So, having great reviews not only helps you earn new business but can also improve your rankings. Google looks at review sentiment on third-party sites to gauge the quality of businesses.



Measure and track the value of Your local citations

Local citation management is a long-term investment. As such, it's likely that your clients or stakeholders will want to know that the investment is actually paying off and returning those local SEO dividends.

There are lots of different ways to track citation statuses and performance, and tools will do a lot of the work for you. And, fortunately, there are a few simple steps you can take to help cover your butt when it comes time to report the fruits of your labor.

How to track the status of local citations

Whether you're working with a local citations service or building citations manually, there are a few ways to track the status of your work.

Some citation building and tracking tools will have open APIs with directories. These help to keep citations live and in place. However, some tools will simply establish your listings and leave it at that.


You'd like to think your citations won't go anywhere, but these things do happen for a variety of reasons, which is why it's so important to keep track.

Using a tool like Cogent Citation Tracker, you can easily see and manage the state of your local citations, looking at things like NAP inconsistencies or missing listings.

From the Citation Tracker dashboard, you can see if citations have increased or decreased, and how you're doing compared to competitors.


Report Details	Schedule	Last Run	Live	Competitor	Actions
Whole Foods Market <small>Location: Whole Foods Market</small>	Weekly Monday	24th May 1 day ago	312 ↑ 1	453 ↑ 4	View Report
Worlds End Barber Shop <small>Location: Worlds End Barber Shop</small>	Weekly Monday	24th May 1 day ago	29	112	View Report
Wine Cellars - Hardy's	Weekly Monday	24th May 1 day ago	165	373	View Report
Wiggemore <small>Location: Wiggemore</small>	Weekly Monday	24th May 1 day ago	404 ↑ 3	1165 ↑ 3	View Report

In the Location report, you can then quickly and easily see a 'Citation Score', as well as how many live and pending local citations you have.

View Report:

Citation Tracker

Generated: 24th May 2021 at 21:46:59[Create Citation Builder Campaign](#)[Actions](#)

We have removed 5 site/s from your report as they could no longer be reached. [Find out more](#)

Key Citations (23)

Live Citations (312)

Pending Citations (0)

Competitor Citations (453)

Key Citations

Citation Tracker looks for your business information on the most important citation sites in the selected country and lists the details here. Inaccuracies and incomplete business information are also highlighted.

Key Citation Score

59/100

Key Citations Overview

23 Found	7 Not Found	12 Correct	7 With NAP Errors
-------------	----------------	---------------	----------------------

You'll also be able to see a summary of your citations, including any errors.

The report gets a lot more granular than this, but it's a lot easier to see if there are any listings in need of your attention than keeping track manually.

To make your life even easier, we'd suggest setting this report to auto-run on a regular basis.

Using data aggregators to submit citations

There are thousands of business directories. Data aggregators help to keep these up to date with accurate information.

What are data aggregators? A local data aggregator (LDA) is an organization that gathers information about other businesses and then passes that data on to other sources. Data aggregators collect information about businesses and distribute it to hundreds of other websites. So, if you send these companies your information, you'll end up with citations in lots of places. Data aggregators work well for submitting to maps, apps, and sites that may not be on your radar.

Think of the function of an aggregator as similar to that of an old-school Yellow Pages—they bring together information such as business name, address, and phone number, but on a much larger scale. Unlike the Yellow Pages, the data gathered by a data aggregator is then funneled to lots of other services for use in a range of ways: in mobile apps, on maps, to populate business directories, and to be used on citation sites, for example.

Any business can sign up to use a data aggregator. Simply create an account, input your business information, and then that LDA takes steps to verify your information. Once verified, you're added to its database along with thousands of other companies with your business information subsequently fed to all of the websites and services that use business data from that aggregator.

Aggregators diffuse their information using systems such as RSS technology, so they can push information on thousands of businesses to thousands of sources quickly and efficiently. It's this process that makes data aggregators a very useful tool for local citation building: just create an account with an LDA, submit your information, and wait as it gets blasted out to multiple sites.

Compare the ease of that process with the prospect of having to submit your information to every local citation site one by one, painstakingly typing out the details of your address, phone number, etc. each time (and consistently and accurately, too!) and it's easy to appreciate their usefulness.

What are the key local data aggregators?

We've seen that data aggregators make quick work of building citations by sending your business information to multiple sites automatically. There is further good news, too: there are less than a handful of data aggregator services in the USA. This means it's not too much of a task to submit your business information.

Foursquare

You'll likely be familiar with Foursquare as a popular mapping solution.

More recently Foursquare has developed and enhanced its location data offering to make it a major player in data integrity and accuracy.

Foursquare is now among the top data aggregators and is favored for its speedy turnaround of listing submissions.

Data Axle

Data Axle says it is “... the leading provider of business data to the top search engines, navigation systems, mobile apps, marketing information programs, and location-based apps. Our data powers the top search engines, because we provide the most accurate, continually-verified collection of real-time business data available, delivered through powerful technology.”

Data Axle accepts business data submissions via its Data Axle Local Listings and BulkUpdate engines.

The process is quick and simple for business owners; simply search Data Axle Local Listings for your business listing and verify the information is correct. Any anomalies can be corrected and updates can be made in future as circumstances change.

Data Axle conducts a phone verification and then makes that data available to its partners, which it says include the leading in-car navigation systems, 85% of the largest public libraries, and the leading search engines, which account for 98% of all US-origin internet searches.

The BulkUpdate works in a similar manner, but is for those with 10 or more listings to submit—for example, brands with multiple physical locations.

Neustar Localeze

Neustar Localeze is a data aggregator for small businesses. Its local search solutions for small businesses are built around True Identity™, its proprietary platform which offers listing management with full control over business data.

It says, “Our True Identity™ service enables businesses to update their local listing information with over 100 local search platforms, mobile applications, navigation systems, and directories at one time—from one place.

“Localeze publishes your listing information to the largest authorized local search platform network in the industry.”

Businesses must take out a subscription to use True Identity™; this is currently \$79 per year, for 1-24 locations with unlimited updates. Data is subject to ongoing verification and validation to ensure complete accuracy and a completeness score is assigned to data, demonstrating how much additional information is required to assure trust in business information.

Using an API to submit citations

Local citations can be submitted through APIs (application program interfaces), automating the process.

It helps to think of an API as a data feed, or pipe—the API absorbs or pumps out information.

There are no humans involved in the process as the API is coded to function autonomously. Many citation providers use APIs to submit to local directories.

In terms of citations, each API will have a set network that it provides information to. Some companies will even have exclusivity partnerships, such as Yext and Yahoo.

Within API solutions, there are two distinct versions:

The **first version** functions by providing data to directories as a kind of “data layer”. This means the API will give Tripadvisor, for example, your information (again, no humans involved here!)

The information is then layered over the existing website. So you’re paying for your business’s information to be put on top of existing data on that page.

As a result, this is a temporary solution, meaning you have to continue paying for the listing for it to remain active.

The **second version** uses APIs to submit data directly into the database. In theory, this method should result in permanent listings, however, that’s often not the case.

The problem is, the information provided by these APIs relies on constant data pushes—much like an RSS feed.

So if you cancel, most listings are likely to revert because there’s nothing to confirm the information is correct.

While API solutions aren’t for everyone, there are a select few instances where API solutions are not only worthwhile but actually preferable.

Say you’re McDonald’s. You’ve got thousands of locations around the world and you’re constantly making changes to menu items, offers, and more. API solutions could allow you to have an always-on approach while doing little heavy lifting yourself.

In the case of huge multi-location businesses that are more concerned with having an up-to-date shop window than sending trust signals to Google, API solutions can work well.

But for businesses who haven’t quite reached levels of world domination like McDonald’s, a direct-to-site solution might be better suited.

How to fix duplicate business listings

Earlier, we looked at the dangers of duplicate listings. Cleaning these up forms a key part of any local citations or listings management strategy.

Once you have identified a duplicate business listing, you need to remove that duplicate so that a single, correct, and complete listing remains. The exact process you'll need to undertake will depend on the directory or platform hosting the duplication. Google My Business, for example, has a specific process to follow but this process will differ to the steps required by a directory such as Yell.

Wherever you do encounter a duplicate listing, you'll need to log in, claim it, and then edit it. If you have pinpointed dozens of duplicates, it's a long and arduous process that requires a lot of manual effort to rectify, but the results are evidently worthwhile.

Some services allow you to suppress duplicate listings while others will merge or remove the listing. Cogent Citation Builder, for example, will either create an account and claim the listing or submit an update or removal request via a web form or editor contact (more info on this can be found here). Again, the exact process will depend on the site or service itself.

Using a citation building service or tool

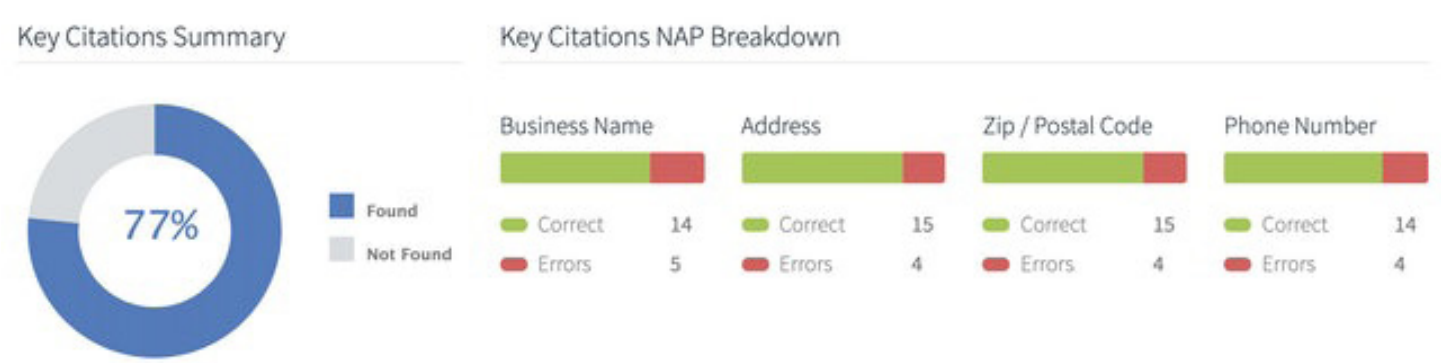
As we've discussed, citation building services and tools can take a lot of the guesswork (and headaches) out of local citation management.

There are lots of different tools out there to help you manage your online business directories, and all of them vary in costs, features, and functionality.

Most of them, however, use the same directories, which can make it difficult to decide what tools to use. However, there are several things to consider when looking for the right listings management tool:

What to Look for in Citation Management Tools

When it comes time to decide which local citation management tool is for you, there are a few criteria you will want to consider.



Citation variety

- Can you select industry-specific directories?
- Can you select specific directories or does the tool pick for you?
- How does the tool set up the citations?
- Does the tool have a direct API to the directories?
- Are aggregator submissions available?
- Is duplicate suppression available?
- How easy is it to manage suppressing duplicates?
- How accurate is the duplicate detection?

Tracking

- What kind of tracking features does the tool offer?
- How accurate is the tracking?
- Can it sync up with other tracking tools?

Price

- Does the price per location on offer fit my budget?
- How does this tool compare to other tools with the same features?

Frequently asked questions about local citation building

We've covered a lot of ground, but with a broad topic like local citation management, it's likely you'll have a few stray questions to resolve.

Can I build citations if I don't have a physical address?

Given the nature of service-area businesses, many owners use their home address on their citation listings, and, therefore, want to hide it on all citation sites. However, not all top-tier citation sites will allow you to hide your address, including two of the aggregators, but some citation sites do allow you to hide the address.

Please note: USPS Stores and PO Boxes are strictly against Google guidelines, so don't resort to using these in local citations. Virtual offices may be fine to use, but make sure to follow this Google guideline: "Service-area businesses can't list a "virtual" office unless that office is staffed during business hours."

Can I use a toll-free number as the main number on GMB and citation listings?

Yes! Google accepts toll-free numbers as the main number on GMB listings, and so do many citation sites.

There are a few sites that don't, like ExpressUpdate.com (this site only allows a phone number with a local area code).

One thing to keep in mind, though, is that according to Google guidelines, businesses should "use a local phone number instead of a central, call center helpline number whenever possible." While it's fine to use a toll-free number as the main number on the website, GMB, and citations, it's still best practice to use a local phone number with a local area code if you can.

Are there workarounds to phone/mail verification on citation sites?

Yes, there are.

To manually verify your Google My Business listing, you'll need to contact Google My Business support and have a representative verify the listing on their side. This will involve the GMB support member either phoning or emailing the business to verify your relationship and potentially request some photos. In some instances, video verification will be required.

These processes will vary greatly depending on the local citation site, so be sure to check out the verification process for each of the top sites.

Can enterprise businesses benefit from citation building?

We've mostly discussed small-scale local citation building, but will businesses with hundreds of locations benefit from listings management? Absolutely.

In cases of multi-location businesses though, you'll need to lean on a tool even more heavily due to the significantly increased scale.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

We made it! After reading this guide to local citation management, you should feel more than equipped to understand the why, what, and how of citation building.

You now know:

- Why citations matter in local SEO
- How citations work, and what data aggregators and APIs are
- The best ways to build citations
- And how to keep track of your citation work

While the role of local citations in local SEO has certainly evolved over the years, it's still an important aspect of building your online search visibility.

With the help of this guide, you should be able to confidently find, build, and manage local citations without it needing to take precedence over other important local SEO activities.

Local Business Citation Service Done-For-You

Just
\$ 500

Sign up

Here's what you get with our citation campaign service:

- ✓ We make sure you're listed in the most widely utilized and reputable directories.
- ✓ We make certain that you're listed in the appropriate industry and regional directories.

- ✓ We double-check that all of the information about your company is correct in the areas where it is listed. One customer we worked with had 26 locations, but roughly ten times as many variants in names and addresses!

- ✓ We'll include a description and logo of your company when possible so that individuals who see it get a consistent message and impression.

- ✓ We'll also inevitably find your company featured in locations you weren't aware of. Duplicate listings, unrecognized YouTube channels, unclaimed Facebook pages, Twitter profiles, and so forth are examples. You may not have set them up, but a lot of these items are populated by computer systems that search the internet for business listings.

- ✓ When we identify those sites, we examine them to see if they are of good quality. If not, we will make every effort to have it removed. If the listing is of sufficient quality, we will claim it and ensure that the information is current.

- ✓ You'll get a record of all the places we found your business listed, what we did to fix / claim / remove the listing, and its status at the time we stopped at the end of the campaign.

- ✓ If there are any consumer reviews, we take note of them as well.



About the author
Stephanie Newton

Stephanie is responsible for managing BrightLocal's community outreach and engagement, as well as producing and managing content to help inform and educate the local SEO community.

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