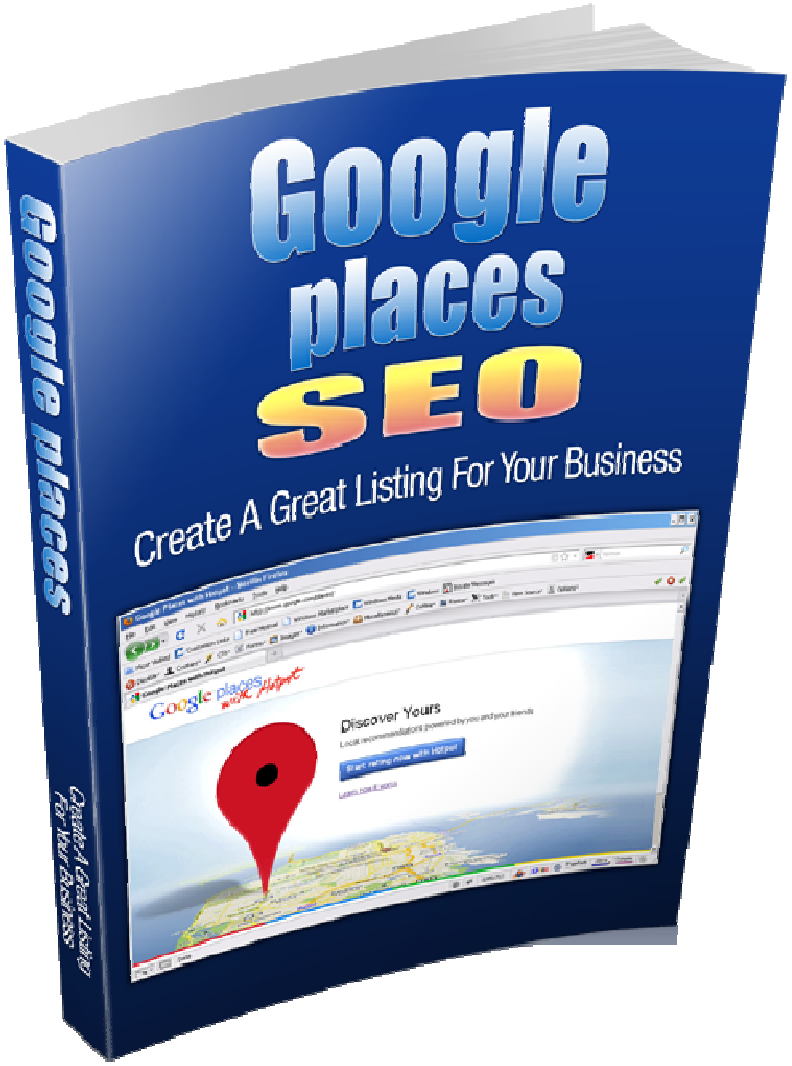
Google Places SEO - How To Create A Great Listing For Your Business!

by Michael Lundgren



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Introduction

Every business can benefit from more exposure. Because of current trends, having a great Google Places listing is almost becoming a necessity.

Statistics indicate that more than 50% of all internet/mobile phone searches conducted in 2010 were looking for information pertaining to a local business. As a result, it has never been more important to ensure that you build a strong and meaningful presence for your business on the web.

This includes the necessity to optimize your website for the search engines AND harness the power of local business listings, like Google Places.

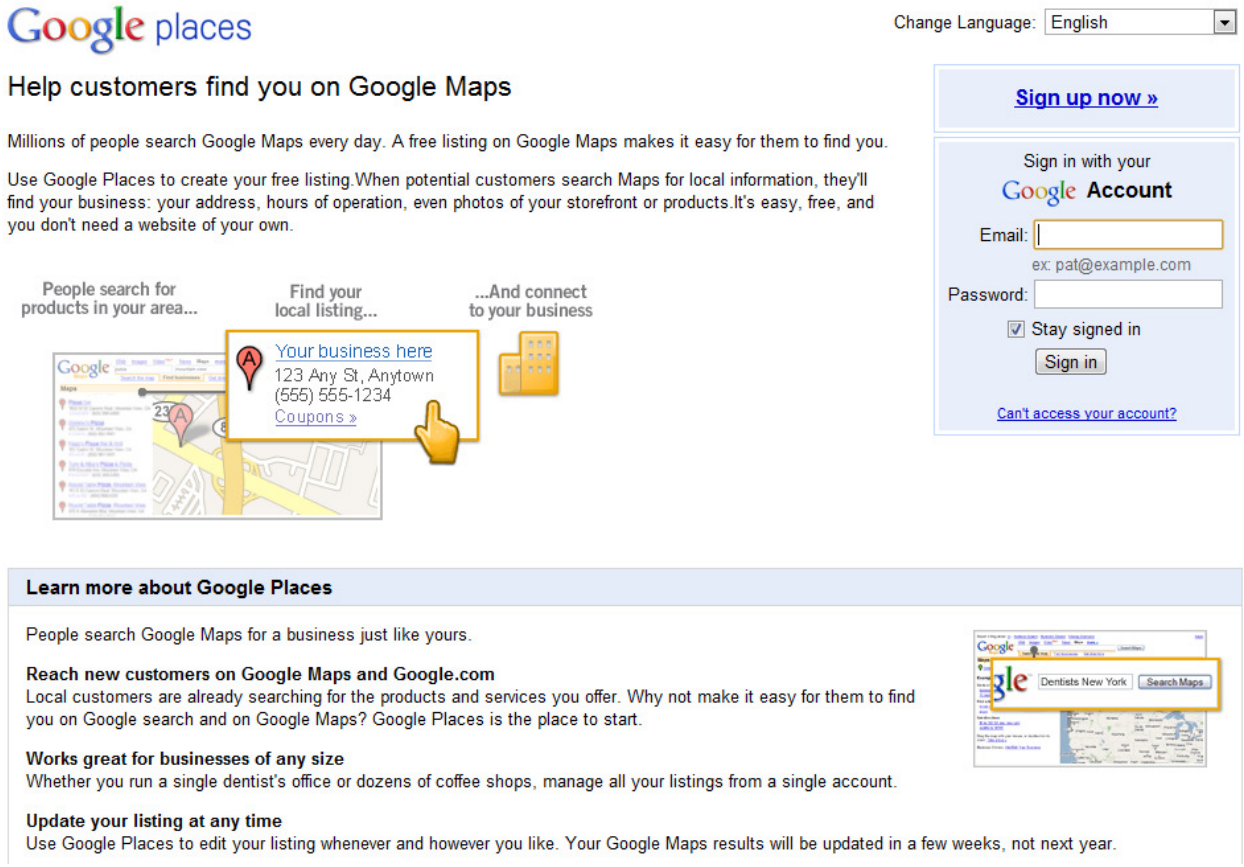
While it is free to create your Google Places listing, there is a lot to know. In this report, I'll do my best to show you how to either create or claim your listing. I'll also give you some helpful tips designed to help your Places Page rank well for the keyword terms you are targeting.

To your success,

Michael Lundgren

What Is Google Places?

Google Places (http://google.com/places) is a free service from Google where business owners can market, promote, and advertise their business. It lets business owners leave their mark on Google Maps and list various information about their business including their business name, products/services, address, contact details, operating hours, accepted modes of payment, photos (of establishment/products), etc.



Google Places was originally known as the Google Local Business Center which was launched on March 15, 2005. Quoting from the press release relating to the launch:

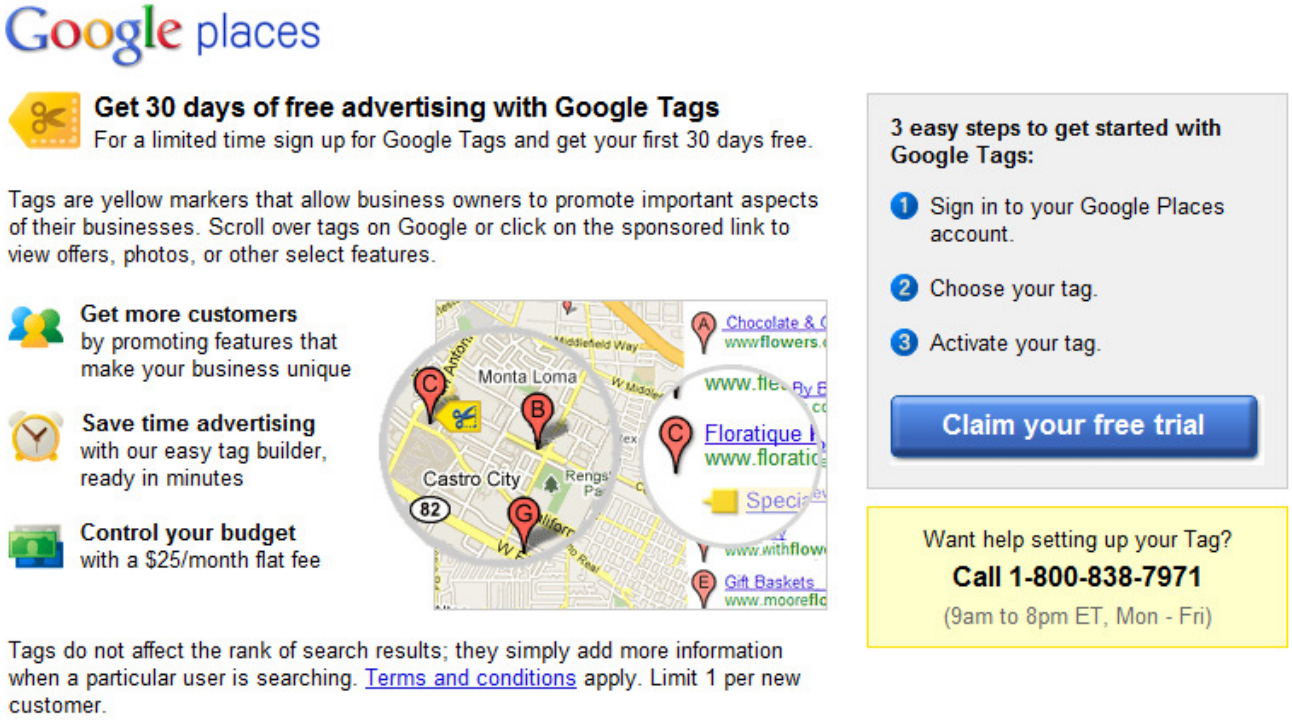
> *The Google Local Business Center enables businesses to more effectively reach consumers searching on Google Local with accurate, useful and up to date information about their business. By enabling businesses to easily add or edit information whenever they like, businesses do not have to worry about outdated content or publishing deadlines. Businesses do not need a website to add a business listing to Google Local through the Local Business Center.*

The service was renamed to Google Places on April 20, 2010 because, according to Google, they wanted to better connect it with "Place Pages."

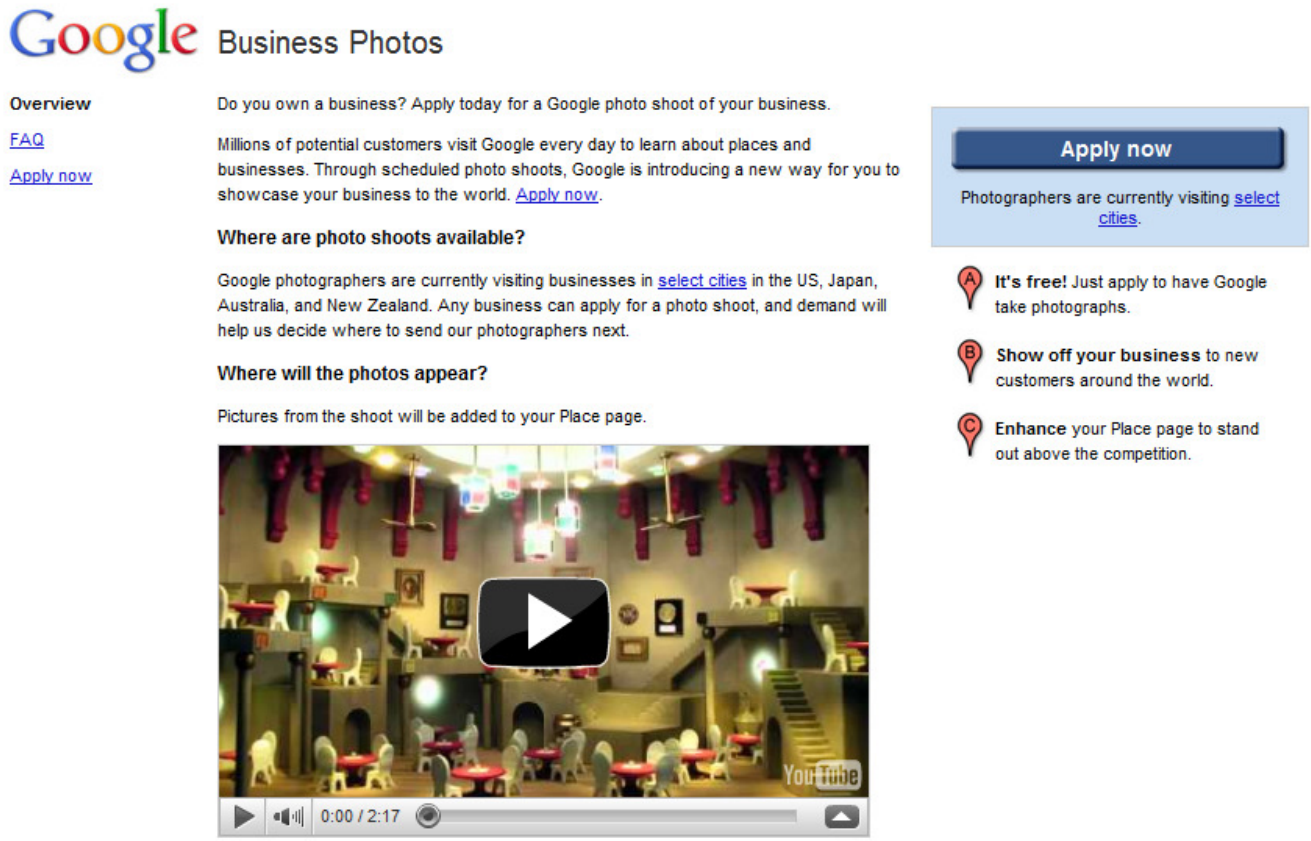
Along with the name change, Google also introduced a few new features, including:

Service Areas – This feature allows businesses to indicate which geographic areas they serve. Additionally, it allows businesses without a storefront or office location to make their address private.

Advertising – For just $25/month, Google enables business owners in select cities to make their listings stand out on Google.com and Google Maps using Tags.



Google Business Photos – Through this service, business owners can request a free photo shoot of the interior of their business for use on their Place Pages. (*Note: As of December 7, 2010, Google photographers are visiting businesses in select cities in the US, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.*)

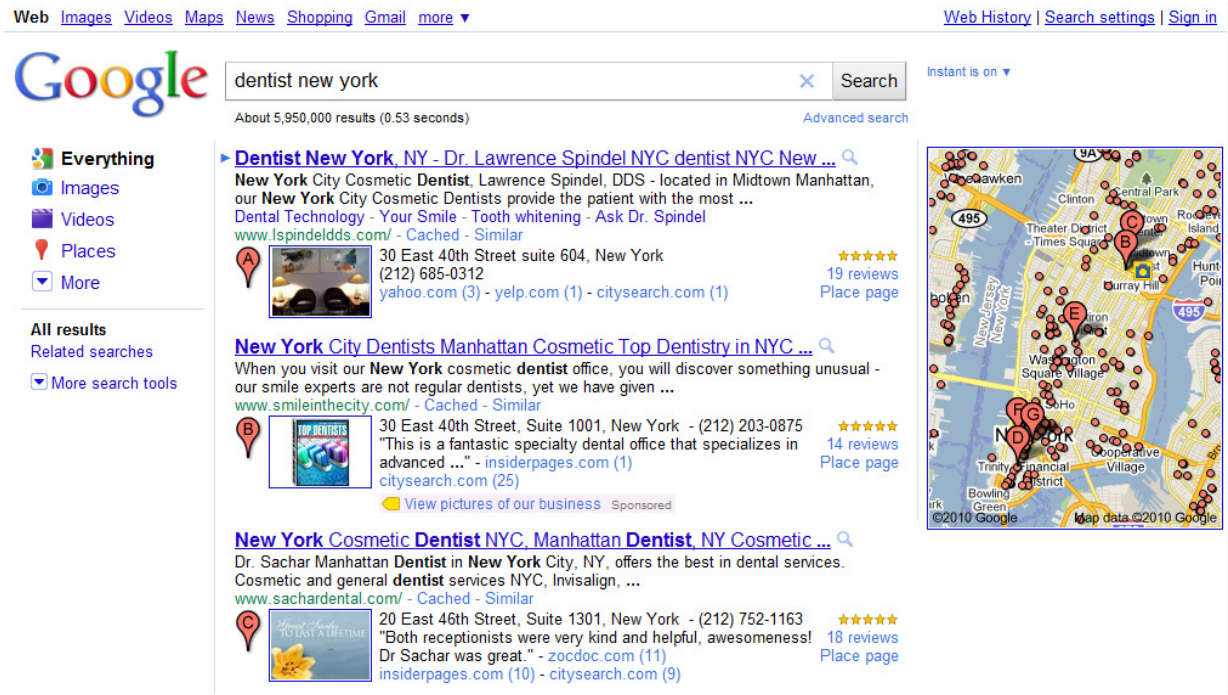


Customized QR Codes – A QR code, which stands for Quick Response code, is a specific matrix barcode (a two-dimensional code). The QR code can be read by dedicated QR barcode readers and most smartphones through the use of an app.

QR codes can be used to do many things, such as to navigate to a website, dial a phone number, and all sorts of other things. The QR codes that Google Places provides will take people directly to the mobile version of the Place Page for the business that owns the QR code.

After you've created your Google Places listing, Google will provide you with a customized QR code (shown on the next page) that will help you market your Place Page more effectively.

One great benefit of having your business listed on Google Places is that you will have the chance to get your business appearing as one of the results on Google's universal search results (via the local business results).



And this document/guide will help you increase your chances of having that happen.

Getting Started

Before going to Google Places and submitting/adding your business listing, you need to first see if your business is already listed in Google Places.

Some of you are probably saying, “How can my business be listed on Google Places if I haven’t done anything yet?”

Well, the thing is, Google collects data for its business listings in two ways.

One way, as already mentioned earlier, is through submissions by the business owners themselves (direct submission). Since direct submissions are done by business owners, Google typically takes listings created through this method as being more authoritative.

The other way Google gathers information for business listings is through third-party websites that have business listings (e.g., online yellow pages, business directories, etc.).

If you have a legally existing/operating business (i.e., one that’s duly registered to/documented by the pertinent agencies), your business is most likely to be already listed on some websites. This is the result of a business listing data center getting your business' information from public listings of your company and sharing it among other directories. And this is how your business could end up already listed on Google Places even if you haven’t done anything yet.

Automatic listings… that’s good. But then again, getting your business listed on Google Places this way comes with some drawbacks.

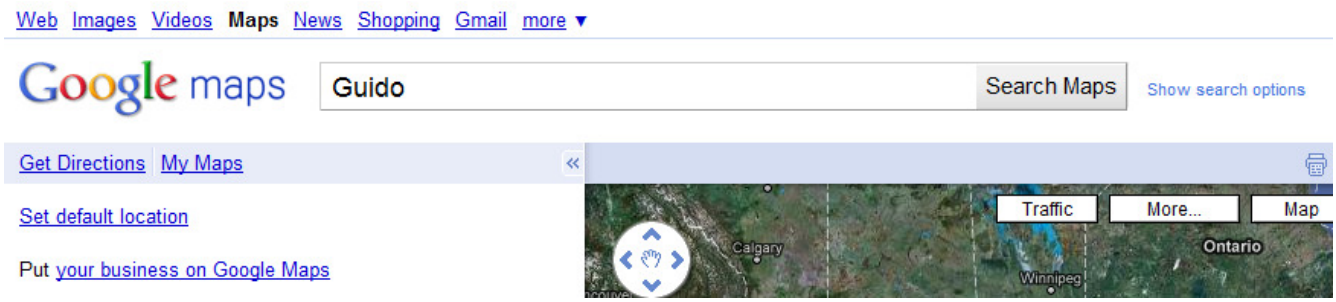
As already mentioned earlier, Google considers the listings it gathers from third-party sites as less authoritative. Another thing is that these are often the cause of a lot of problems in Google Places, such as incorrect business information and duplicate listings.

So, you're checking for your business for two reasons… one is to see whether or not your business is already listed, and the other is to check for and weed out errors (if there are any).

Searching for Your Business

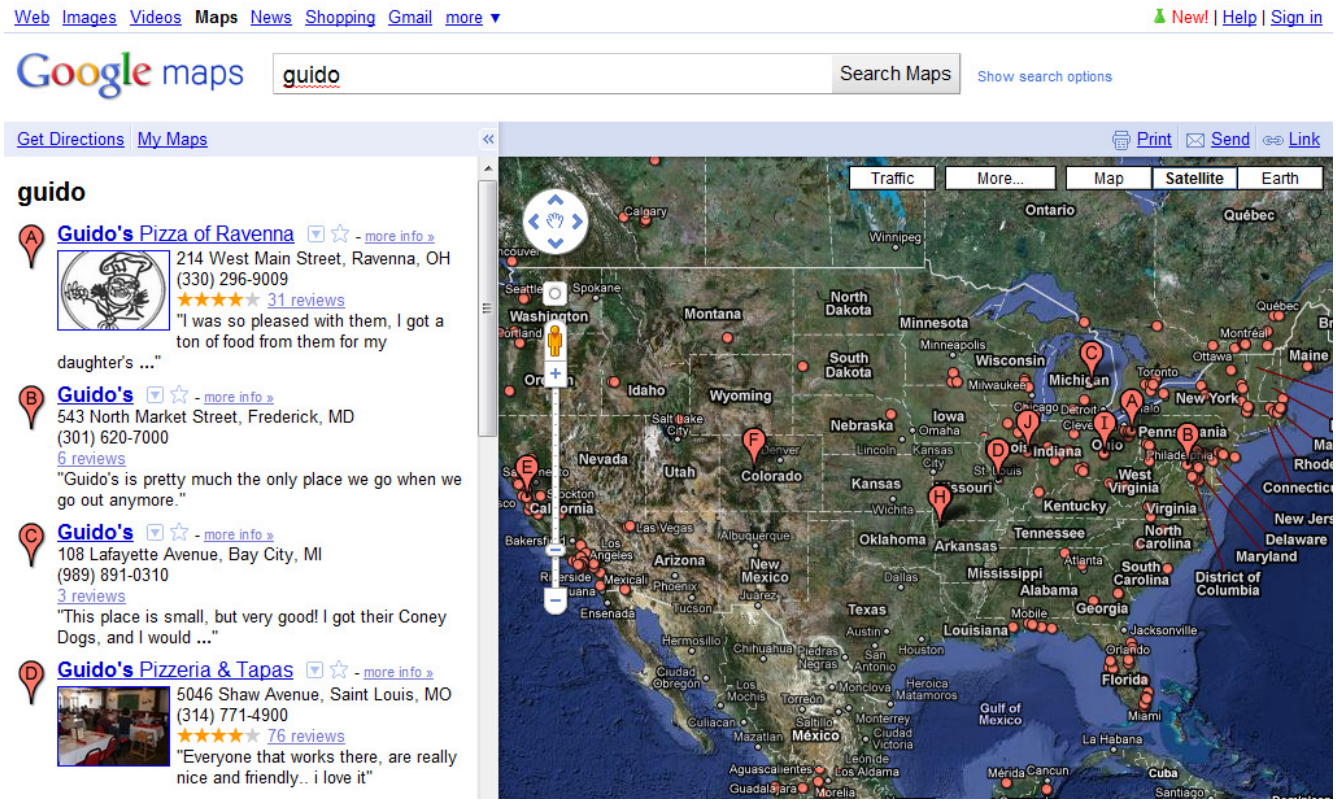
To search for your business on Google Places, go to Google Maps (http://maps.google.com).

In the field provided, search for your business name, address, and phone number (one at a time).

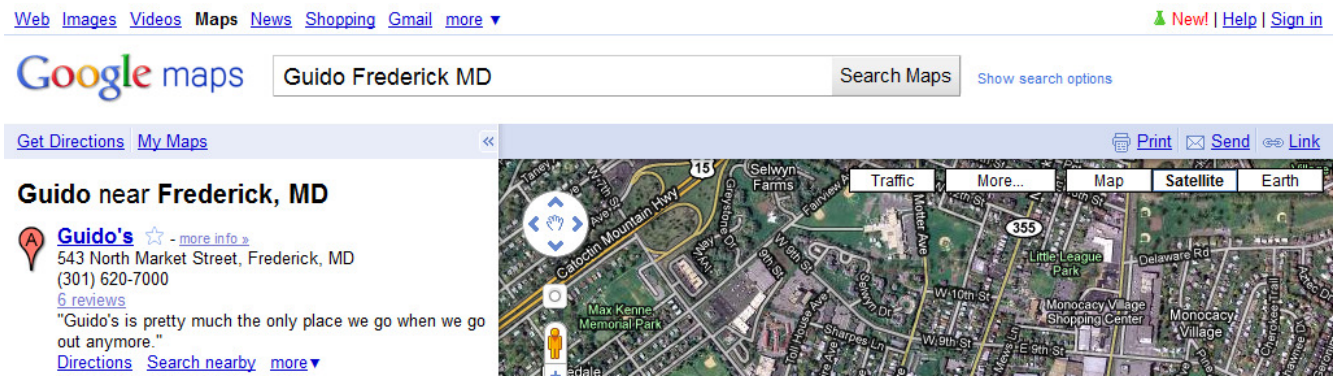


Searching for this information should increase your chances of finding your business listing (if it exists) even if it has typographical (or any) errors.

As you can see below, our sample search turned up quite a number of results.



If you're faced with this situation, you can narrow down the results by doing another search using your business name and city and State of operation as your search term. For example "Guido Frederick MD".

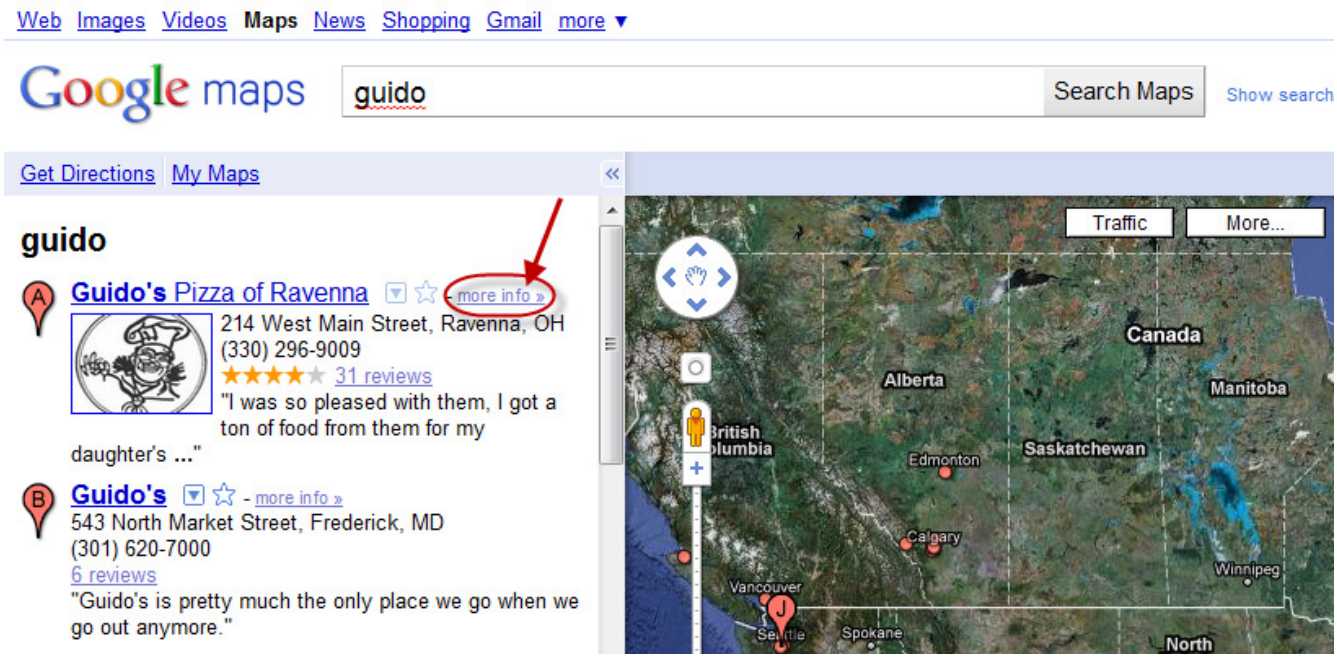


Now, what do you do if you do find your business already listed on Google Places?

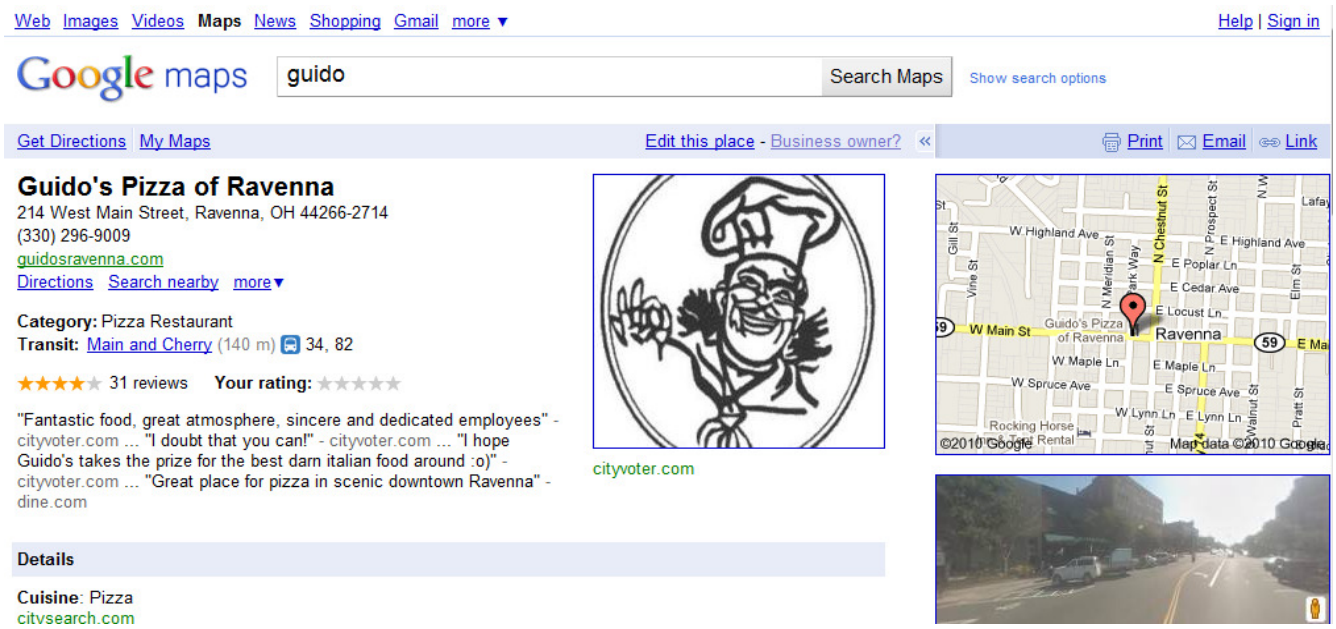
Well, the first thing you must do is to check whether the listing has already been claimed or not. A "claimed" listing (otherwise known as an "owner-

verified listing") means that the listing has already been claimed by somebody as its owner.

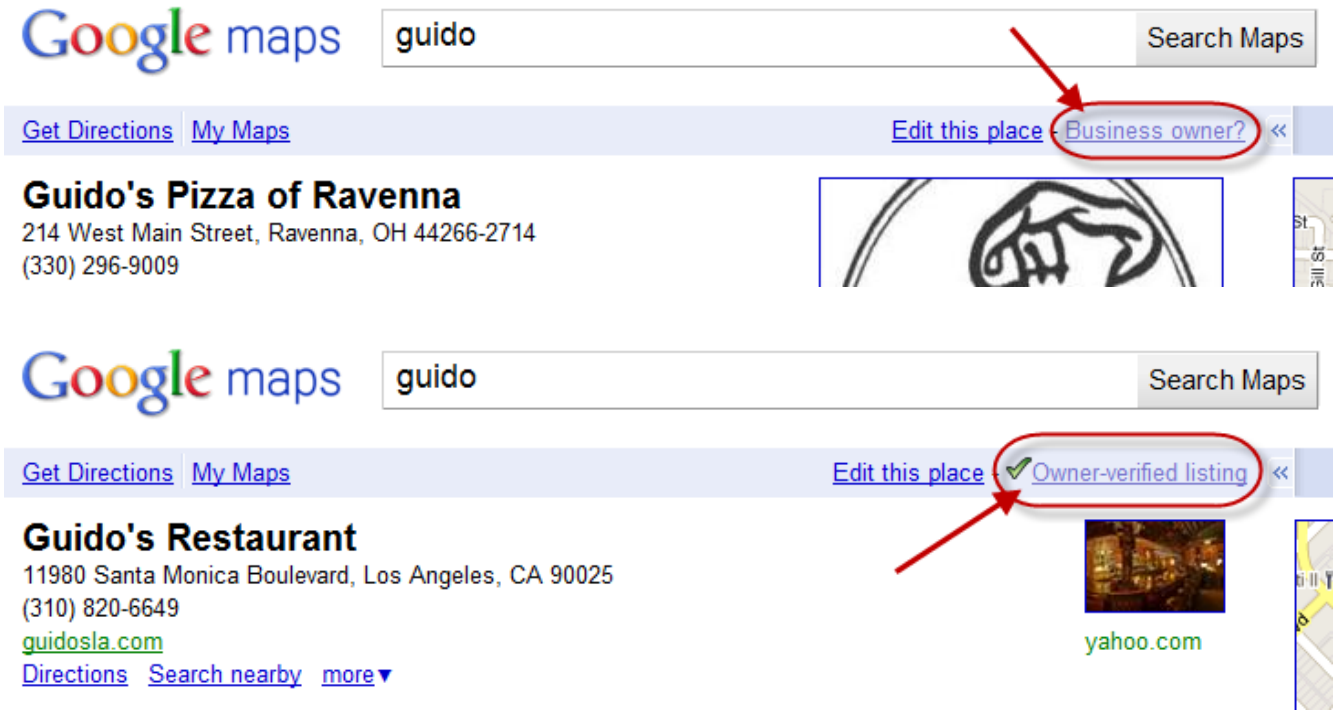
To know whether a business has already been claimed/verified or not, click on the **more info** link that corresponds to your listing.



This will take you to the listing's **Place Page**.



This is where you will see whether the listing has already been claimed or not.



Notice the links highlighted in the above screenshots.

If the link says “Business owner?” that means the listing has not yet been claimed/verified. One the other hand, if it says “Owner-verified listing”, that mean someone is already claiming ownership of the business and the listing.

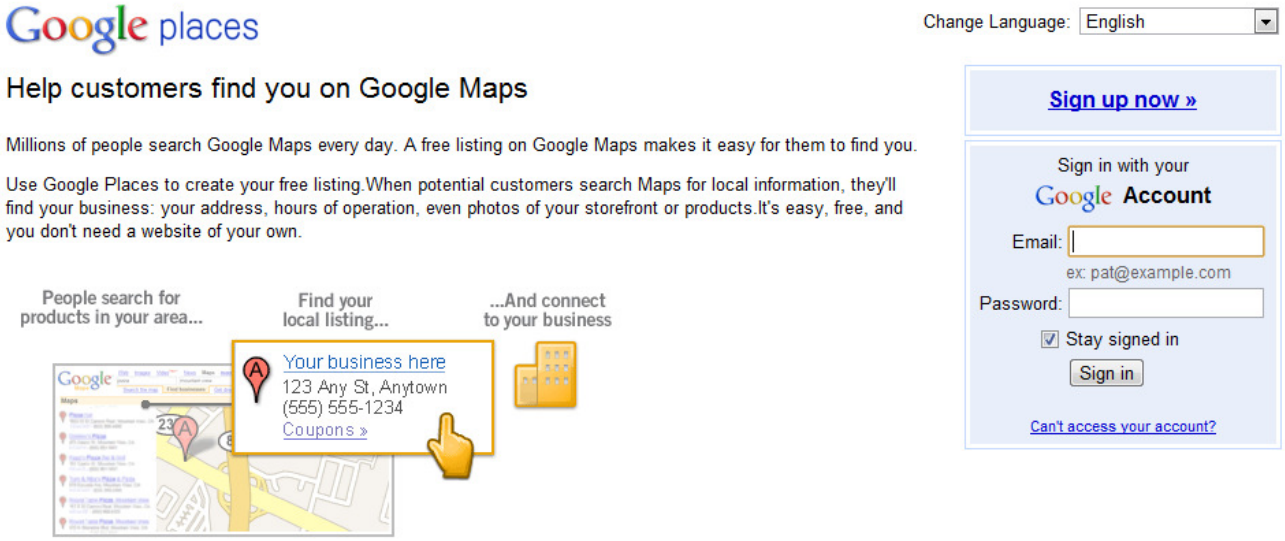
Obviously, you would want the link to say “Business owner?” But what if it indicates that it’s owned by someone already? Don't worry... just read on.

Getting Listed In Google Places

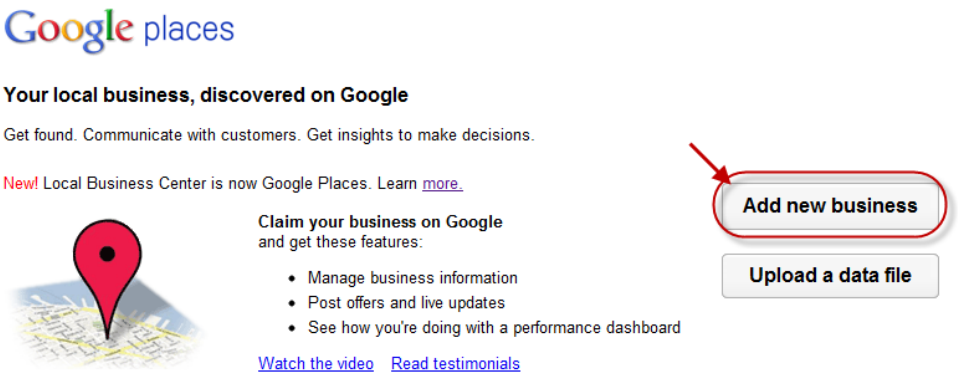
Before you proceed, please note that you will need to have a Google Account before you can actually do anything on Google Places.

Go to http://google.com/places

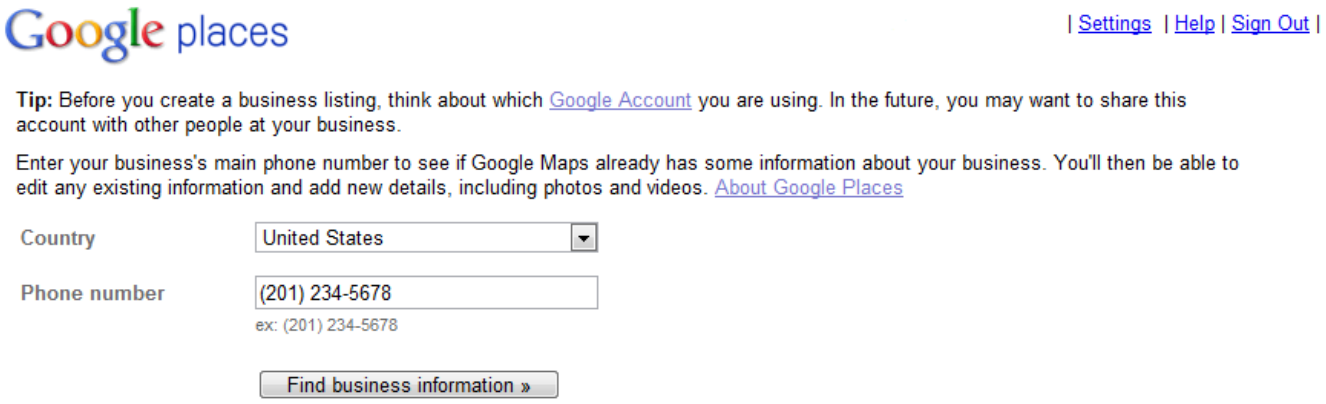
If you already have a Google Account, sign in to your account through the login fields provided. Otherwise, click on the **Sign up now** link to create your account.



Once logged in, click on the **Add new business** button.

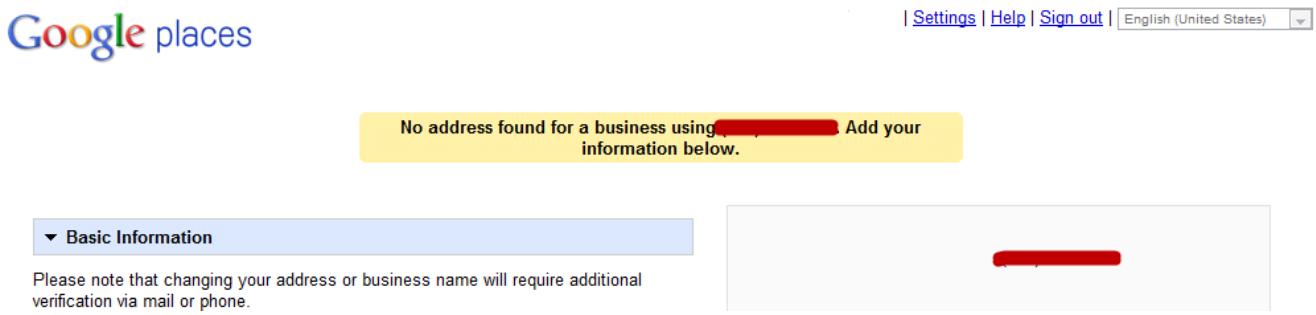


Choose your country from the **Country** dropdown menu and enter your business' main phone number in the **Phone number** field.



Note that Google Places uses the info you provide to find out if your business is already listed or not.

If your business is not yet listed, you will see a note saying that no address has been found for a business using the phone number you provided.



Go ahead and fill out as much information as you can about your business in the form provided.

Under **Basic Information**:

Choose your country from the **Country** dropdown menu.

Enter your business name in the **Company/Organization** field.

Enter your business' complete address in the **Street Address**, **Postal Code**, **City/Town**, and **Province fields**.

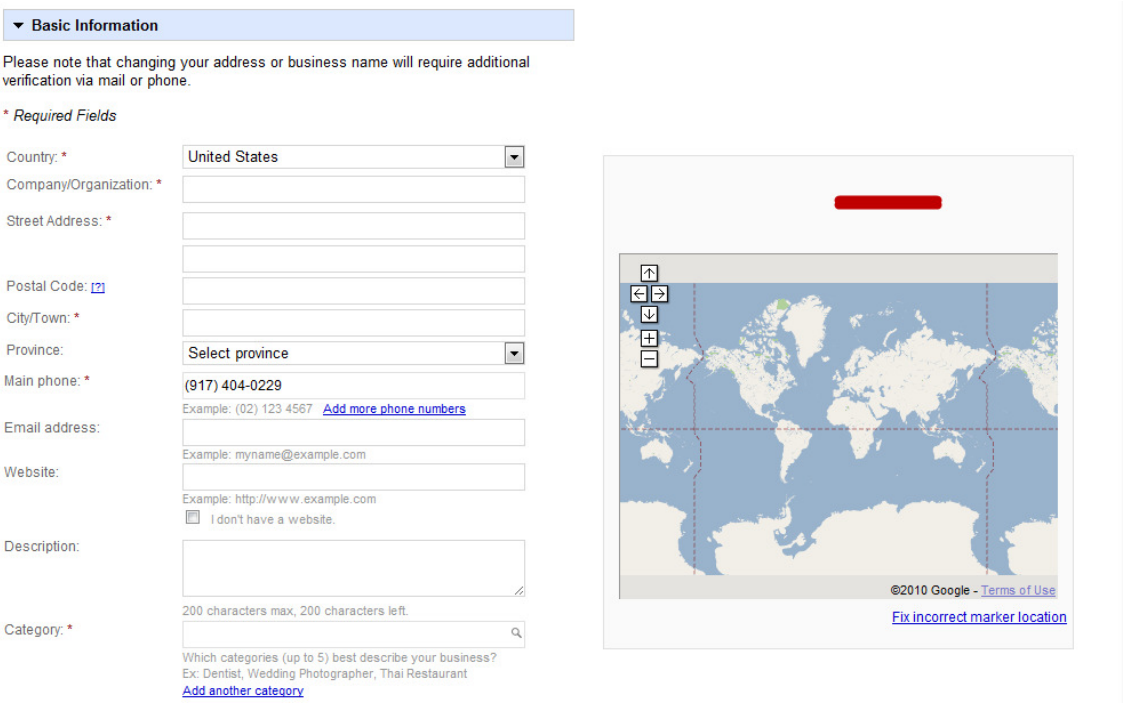
Enter your business' phone number in the **Main phone** field.

Enter your business' email address in the **Email address** field.

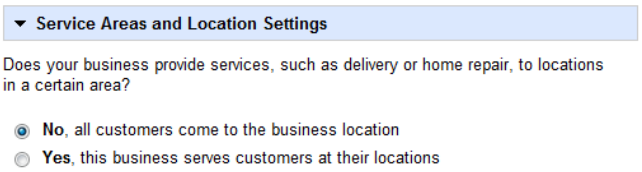
Enter your business' website's URL in the **Website** field.

Enter a brief description about your business in the **Description** field (up to 200 characters).

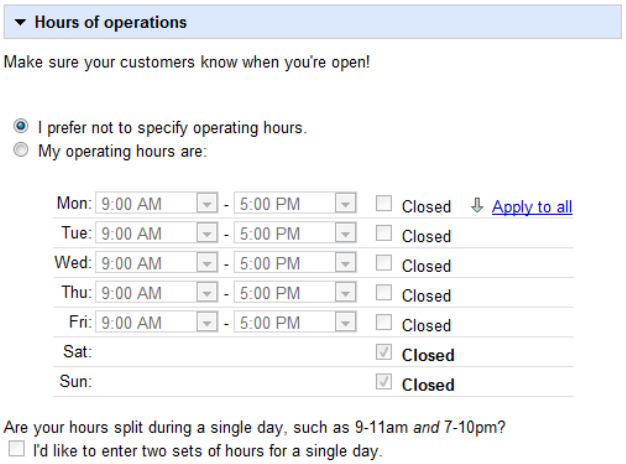
Enter up to 5 categories that best describe your business in the **Category** field (e.g., Ex: Dentist, Wedding Photographer, Thai Restaurant).



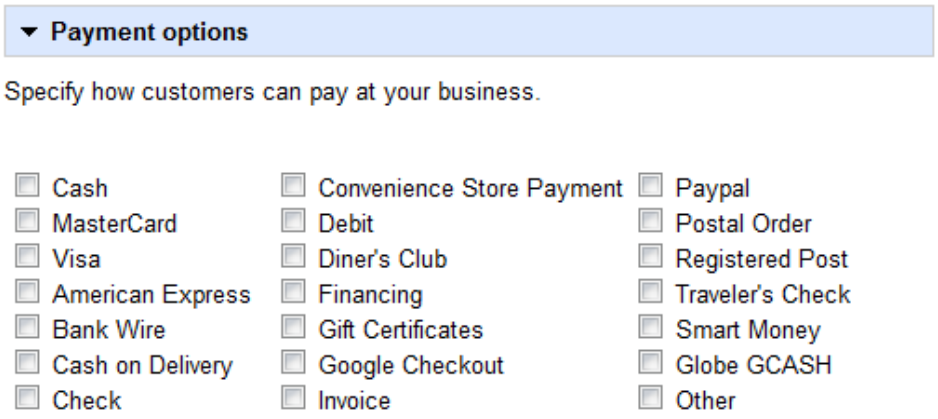
Under **Areas and Location Settings**, choose the option that best describes your business.



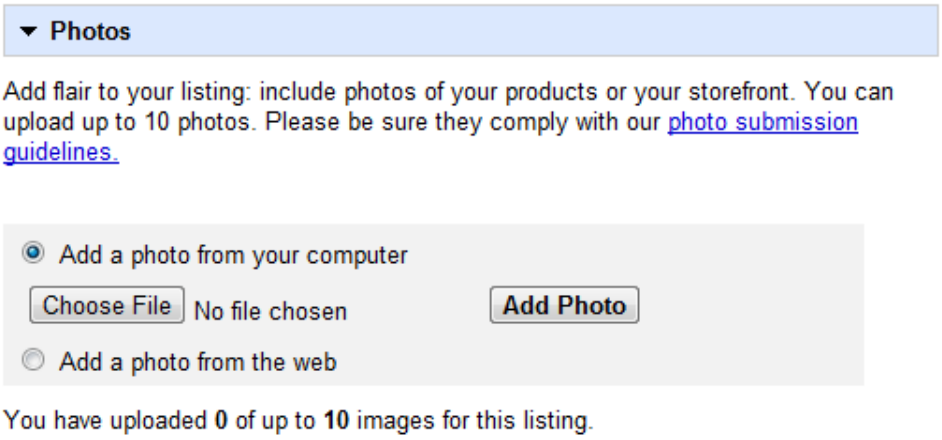
Under **Hours of operations**, indicate when your business is open and closed. You can also choose not to indicate your business' operating hours.



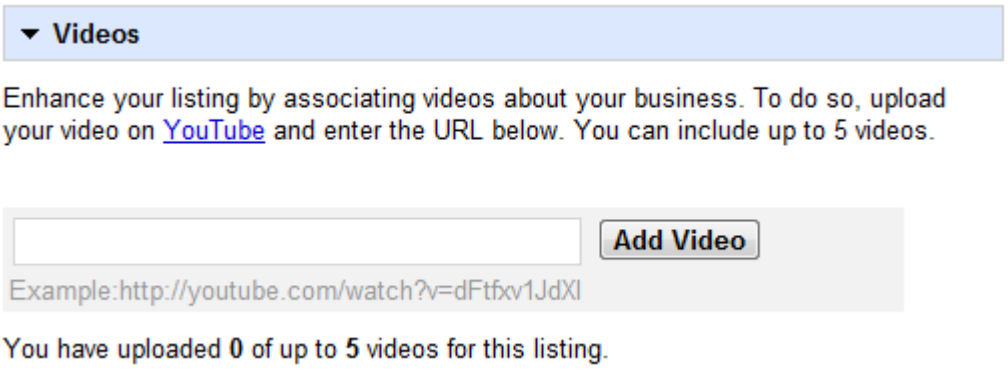
Under Payment options, choose the modes of payment that your business accepts.



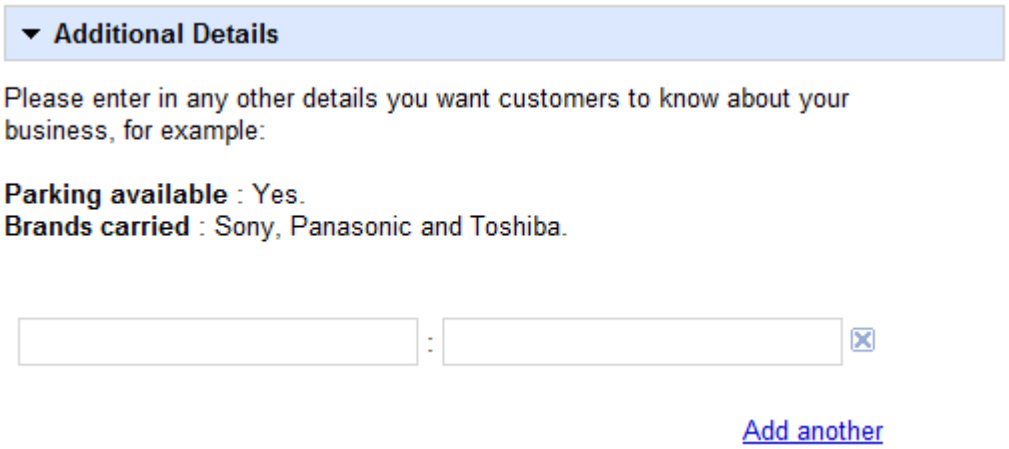
Under **Photos**, upload photos of your establishment and/or products. You are allowed to upload up to 10 photos.



Under **Videos**, you can enter the links of up to 5 YouTube videos related to your business.

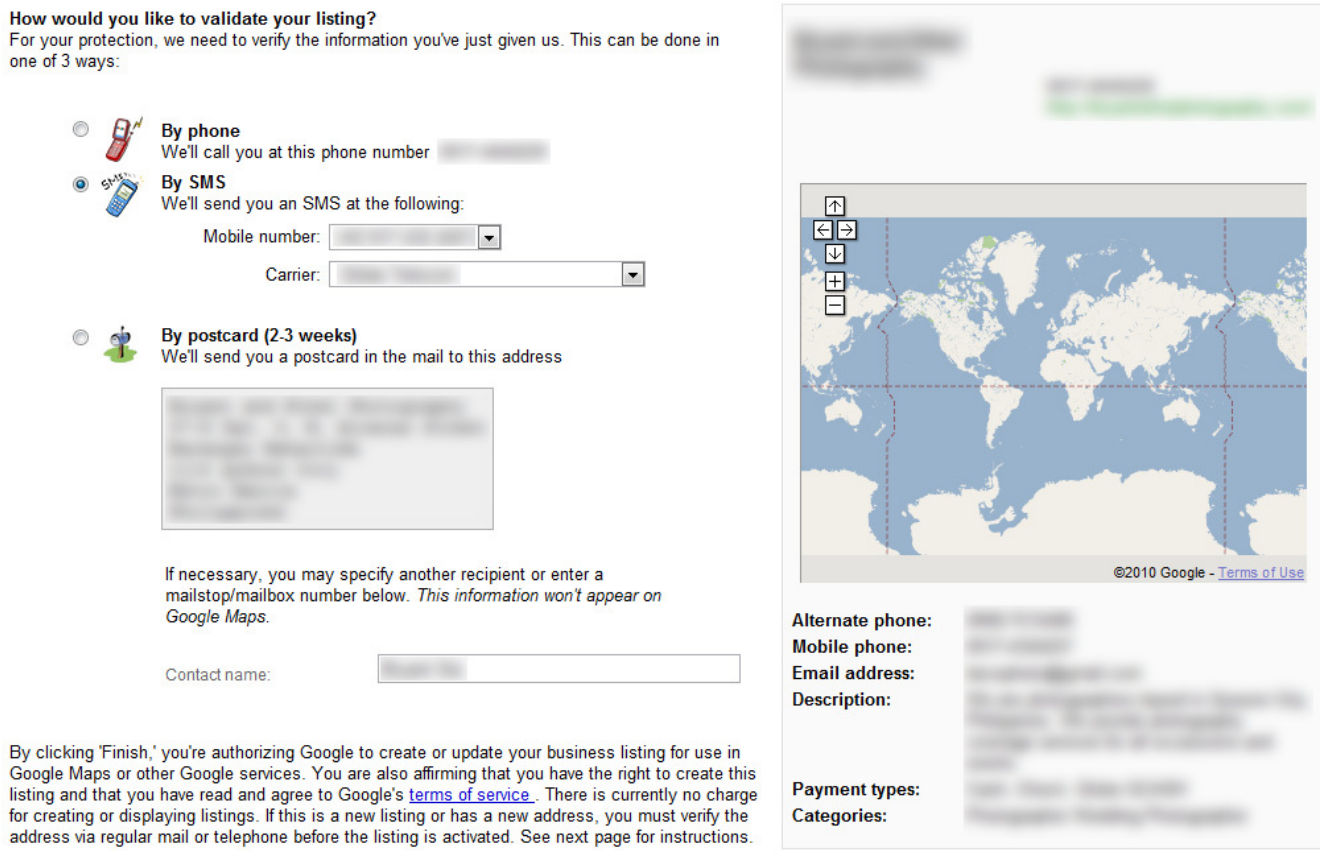


Under **Additional Details**, you can add any "custom" details that you may have.



Click on the **Submit** button when you're done.

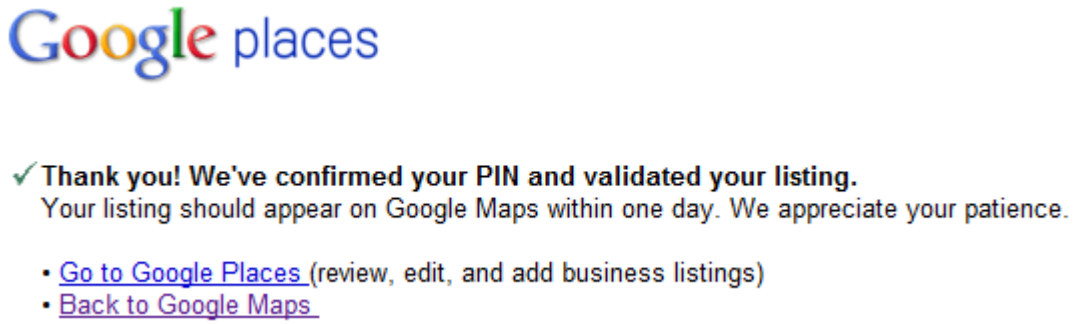
Choose your desired validation method.



Click on the **Finish** button at the bottom of the page.

On your Google Places dashboard, enter the **PIN** sent to you by Google through your chosen validation method.

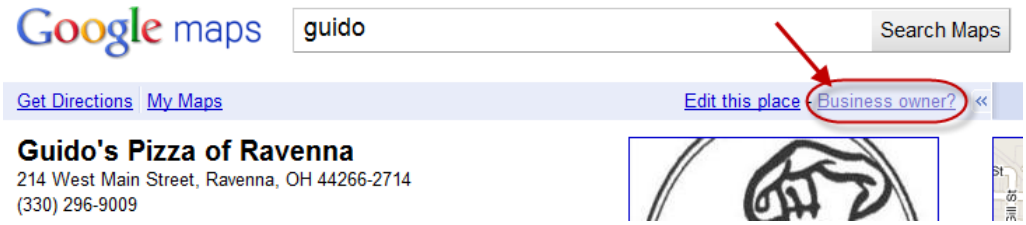
You should be presented with a note that tells you that your listing has been validated.



The key here is to be as comprehensive as you can in filling out your business information. Give as much detail as possible, do not leave anything blank.

Is Your Business Already Listed?

If your business is already listed on Google Places, all you have to do is to click on the **Business owner?** link. Save for the fact that some information will already be filled out, the following processes will be the same as what has been outlined earlier (for creating a listing).



But what if someone has already claimed it?

Yes, it can happen.

Well, Google advises that you report your problem to them via their Report a problem link:

http://www.google.com/support/places/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=176504

and verify your business afterwards.

Google's Advice For Ranking Well

As you probably already know, the best way to ensure that Google doesn't ignore you (or worse, penalize you) is to stick by their rules and guidelines.

The following are from the **Google Places Help for business owners**.

Get started: Quality guidelines
http://www.google.com/support/places/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=107528&rd=1

Your Google Places Account

Ownership: Only business owners or authorized representatives may verify their business listings on Google Places.

Account Email Address: Use a shared business email account, if multiple users will be updating your business listing. If possible, use an email account under your business domain. For example, if your business website is www.google.com, a matching email address would be you@google.com.

Your Business Listing

Business Name: Represent your business exactly as it appears in the offline world.

1) Do not include marketing taglines in your business name.
2) Do not include phone numbers or URLs in the business name field, unless they are part of your business name.
3) Do not attempt to manipulate search results by adding extraneous keywords or a description of your business in the business name field.

Business Location: Use a precise, accurate address to describe your business location.

- Do not create listings at locations where the business does not physically exist. P.O. Boxes are not considered accurate physical locations. Listings submitted with P.O. Box addresses will be removed.

- Use the precise address for the business in place of broad city names or cross-streets.
- Do not create more than one listing for each business location, either in a single account or multiple accounts.
- Businesses that operate in a service area, as opposed to a single location, should not create a listing for every city they service. Businesses that operate in a service area should create one listing for the central office or location and designate service areas. Learn how to add service areas to your listing.
- Businesses with multiple specializations, such as law firms and doctors, should not create multiple listings to cover all of their specialties. You may create one listing per practitioner, and one listing for the office.
- Do not include information in address lines that does not pertain your business's physical location (e.g. URLs, keywords).

Website & Phone: Provide a phone number that connects to your individual business location as directly as possible, and provide one website that represents your individual business location.

- Use a local phone number instead of a call center number whenever possible.
- Do not provide phone numbers or URLs that redirect or "refer" users to landing pages or phone numbers other than those of the actual business.

Categories: Provide at least one category from the suggestions provided in the form as you type. Aim for categories that are specific, but brief.

1) Categories should say what your business is (e.g. Hospital), not on what it does (e.g. Vaccinations) or things it sells (e.g. Sony products or printer paper). This information can be added in your description or as custom attributes.
2) Categories should not contain location-based information (for example, Dog Walker Los Angeles is not permitted).
3) Only one category is permitted per entry field. Do not "stuff" entry fields with multiple categories.

Custom Attributes & Description: Use the description and custom attribute fields to include additional information about your listing.

Other Items of Note

Ineligible Business Models: Only businesses that make in-person contact with customers qualify for a Google Places listing.

- Businesses that are under construction or that have not yet opened to the public are not eligible for a listing on Google Places.
- Rental properties, such as vacation homes or vacant apartments, are not eligible for a listing on Google Places. Create a listing for the central office that processes the rentals, rather than the individual rental properties. If you'd like, you can then add your real estate properties to Google Maps so that they are available on our Real Estate layer.

Tips for your business listing: Help users find your business
http://www.google.com/support/places/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=148047&rd=1

1. Make sure your listing is complete and accurate.

    - Make sure your business location is entered correctly on the map so users can find you easily. You can drag the map marker to your exact business location.
    - List your authoritative and official business website on your Places listing, since Google uses information from your website to help improve search results.
    - Include images and videos to help your listing stand out.
    - Add information such as opening hours, payment types, and additional details to help users choose among search results.
    - To learn more about helping Google crawl and index your site, take a look at the Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide.
    - Of course, be sure that your business name, physical address, and phone number(s) are correct.

2. Choose the most appropriate, specific categories for your business.

- Pick a category from the list of suggestions to help Google to show your business for the right searches (although you can always enter your own category if Google Places doesn't suggest one that fits your business).
- Don't be afraid to choose specific categories instead of broad ones. The important thing is that the categories are accurate and describe your business well. Google's search algorithm makes sure that users looking for "Book Stores" will see businesses in more specific categories like "Used Book Stores," "Comic Book Stores," and "Rare Book Stores" too.

3. Establish a strong, accurate presence on the web.

    - Google improves search results by aggregating information about your business from all over the web. Make sure information about your business on third-party sites is accurate, and try to contact the respective site directly to correct any inaccurate information.
    - Encourage customers to review or blog about your business. Google uses reviews and feedback to improve search results.

4. Become a Favorite Place on Google.

    - We identify the most popular local businesses on Google Places as Favorite Places, based on how many Google users looked for additional info about the business. You might find a Favorite Places sticker from us displayed at these businesses. Find out more about Favorite Places, and how to become one.

Website Ranking Factors

If you still don't have a website, it's time to seriously consider having one created. What easier way to let Google know that you're running a real business other than to have a website for your business?

In addition to having a website and linking to it from your Place Page, you have to make sure that the information found on your Google Places listing is also found on your web site and vice versa. Additionally, it's also important that your business information is easily found and read on your site.

Keeping it Real

By the way, by "easily found and read" I mean both by humans and bots/crawlers. Remember that Google (and the other search engines) uses bots (software programs) to crawl the Web and look for and gather information. So, make sure that all of the important/relevant information about your business you put on your site is written in "real text". Save the images/graphics/animations for photos and other things. For text, use REAL text.

Address

Not only should your address be written in real text, but it will also be beneficial to you if you'd put your business address on every page of your site (like in the footer).

Microformatting

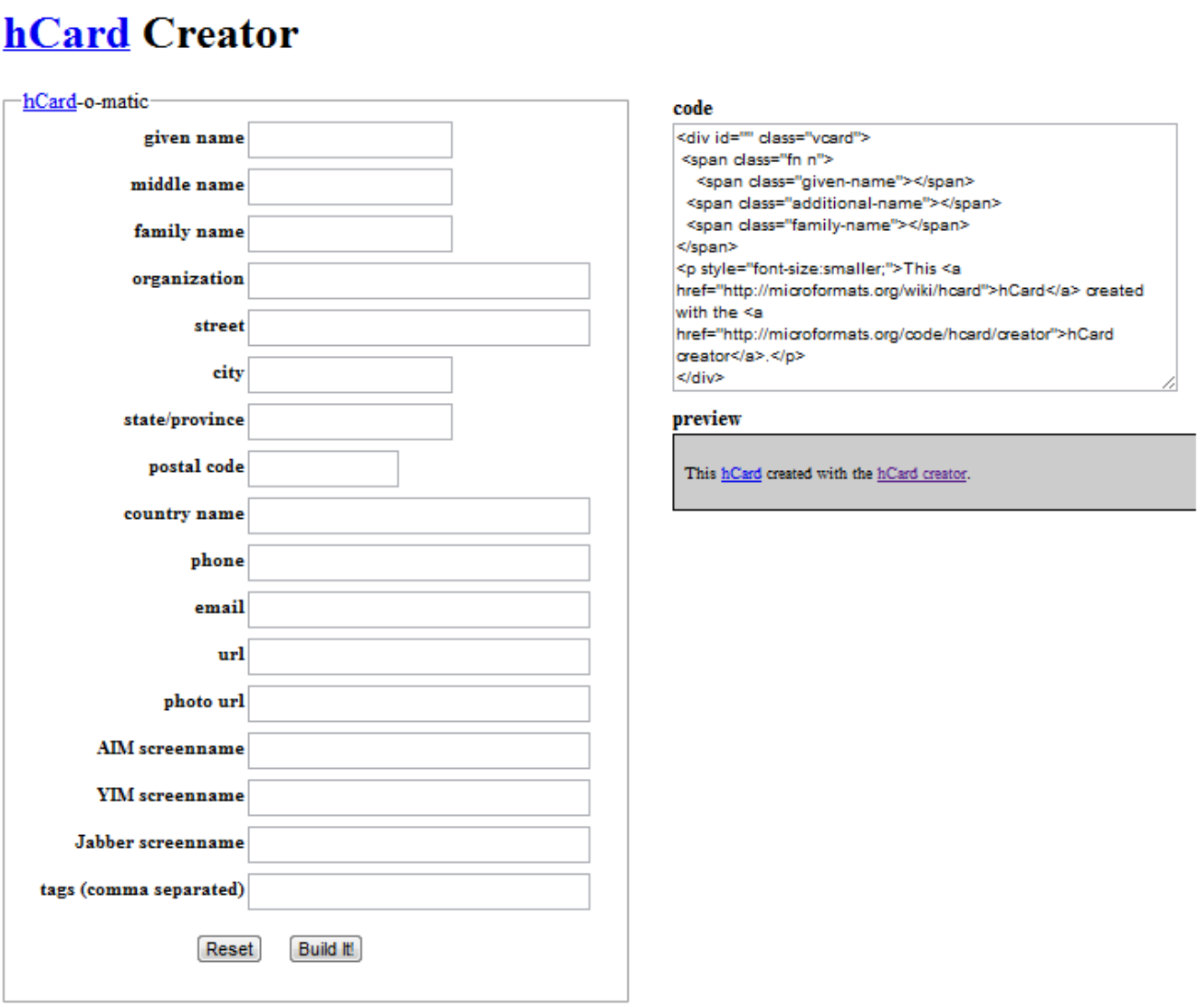
Microformatting allows software (such as search engine crawlers) to process information found on a website that is intended for end-users (e.g., contact information, geographic coordinates, calendar events, and the like) automatically.

An example of a microformat is the hCard. It's actually quite easy to use (provided that you have some knowledge in HTML).

Here's an example of how hCard microformatting is done. For example, if your telephone number appears on your page, all you have to do is to enclose it with the
following tag:

555-555-5555

Another way of generating an hCard microformat for your site is to go to Microformats.org and use their hCard creator tool (which can be found at http://microformats.org/code/hcard/creator).



KML/Geo Sitemaps

If this is your first time to hear about it, the KML file is what Google Earth, Google Maps, and various other mapping programs use to store map information.

KML files are very complex, containing coordinates and a whole bunch of other numbers. Just take a look at the sample below:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<kml xmlns="http://www.opengis.net/kml/2.2">
  <Placemark>
    <name>The Pentagon</name>
    <Polygon>
      <extrude>1</extrude>
      <altitudeMode>relativeToGround</altitudeMode>
      <outerBoundaryIs>
        <LinearRing>
          <coordinates>
            -77.05788457660967,38.87253259892824,100
            -77.05465973756702,38.87291016281703,100
            -77.05315536854791,38.87053267794386,100
            -77.05552622493516,38.868757801256,100
            -77.05844056290393,38.86996206506943,100
            -77.05788457660967,38.87253259892824,100
          </coordinates>
        </LinearRing>
      </outerBoundaryIs>
      <innerBoundaryIs>
        <LinearRing>
          <coordinates>
            -77.05668055019126,38.87154239798456,100
            -77.05542625960818,38.87167890344077,100
            -77.05485125901024,38.87076535397792,100
            -77.05577677433152,38.87008686581446,100
            -77.05691162017543,38.87054446963351,100
            -77.05668055019126,38.87154239798456,100
          </coordinates>
        </LinearRing>
      </innerBoundaryIs>
    </Polygon>
  </Placemark>
</kml>
```

The good news is there's a site/service that can and will generate one for you for free. You can find it at http://www.geositemapgenerator.com/

This site will generate both the KML and XML files you'll need to make it work.

The KML file goes in your site's directory (on your web server) and the XML file is submitted to Google via Google Webmaster Tools (http://www.google.com/webmasters/).

Offsite Ranking Factors

Citations and Reviews

A citation is simply a listing for your business on another site (including the business name, phone number and address). Yes, it's very much like link building, except that instead going around looking for sites where you can drop your link, you need to only look for sites that allow you to list your business with the address and phone number. This also includes sites that allow users to user to submit a review of your product or service.

The bottom line is that the more citations and reviews you have, the better your Google Places listing will rank.

Link Building

If you don't know it yet, link building is one of the most important factors in SEO, whether local or global. This is because in the eyes of search engines, the more in-bound links that a site has, the more trustworthy it is. And the more trustworthy a site is, the higher it is ranked in the SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages).

Link building should be done with a significant amount of care, though.

The thing with link building is that quality trumps quantity. And when it comes to links, quality is tied to where the in-bound links are located.

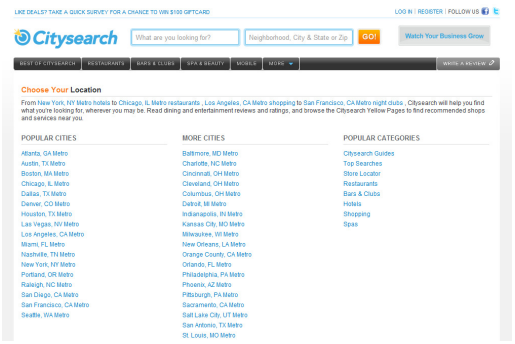
The concept is actually very simple. If an inbound link is coming from a "bad/questionable" (or poor quality) site, that link is considered as a "poor/low" quality link. On the other hand, if a link is on a good/reputable site, that link is considered as a "good/high" quality link.

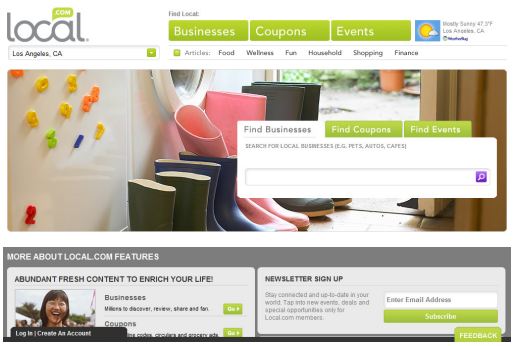
Among the best places to drop your links (in addition to those already mentioned earlier) are at directories. I've provided samples of these towards the end of this report.

Social media profiles (like those on social bookmarking sites, video sharing sites, social networking sites, microblogging sites, etc.) are also a good place to "drop" your links.

Here are a variety of places that you can build both citations and links:

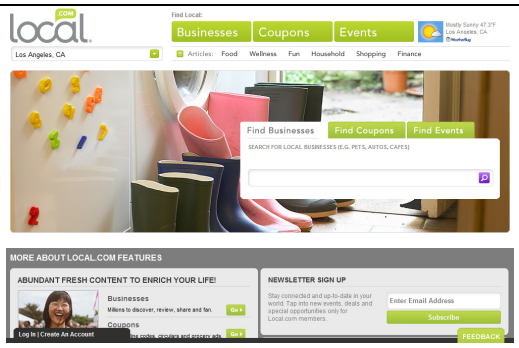
Online Yellow Pages and Review Sites

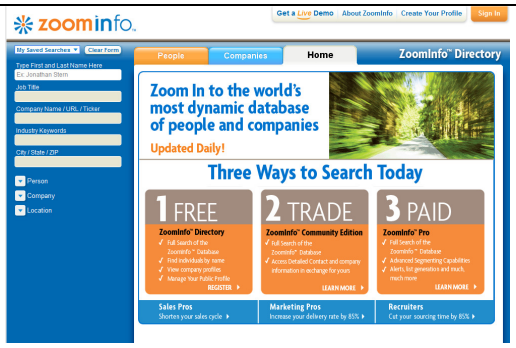
CitySearch.com URL: http://www.citysearch.com	**SuperMedia** URL: http://www.supermedia.com/
	

Local.com URL: http://www.local.com/	**ZoomInfo** URL: http://www.zoominfo.com/
	

Feeder Directories

infoUSA.com URL: http://www.infousa.com/	**Data by Acxiom** URL: http://www.databyacxiom.com/

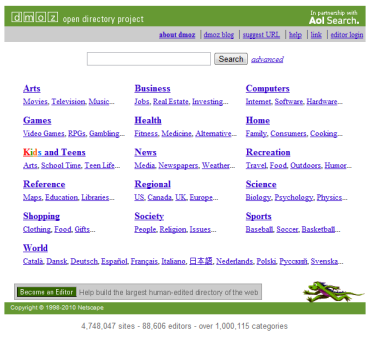




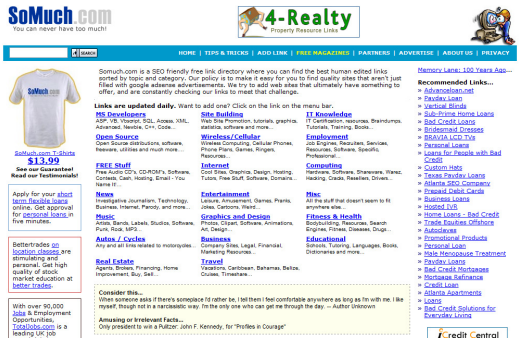
Localeze
URL: http://www.localeze.com/

Free Web Directories

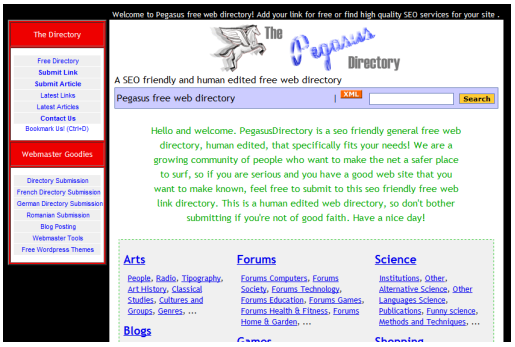
DMOZ
URL: http://www.dmoz.org/



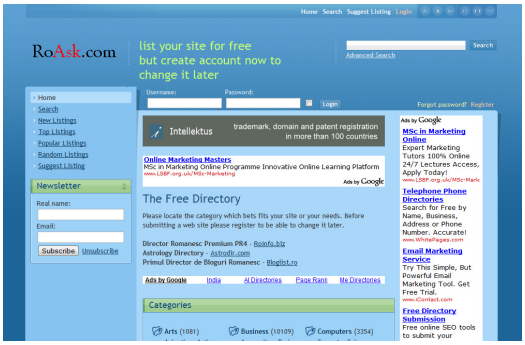
So Much
URL: http://www.somuch.com/



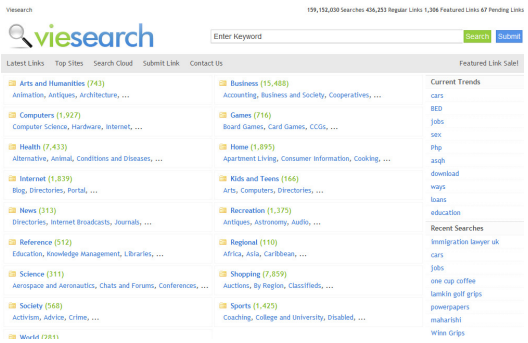
Pegasus Directory
URL: http://www.pegasusdirectory.com/



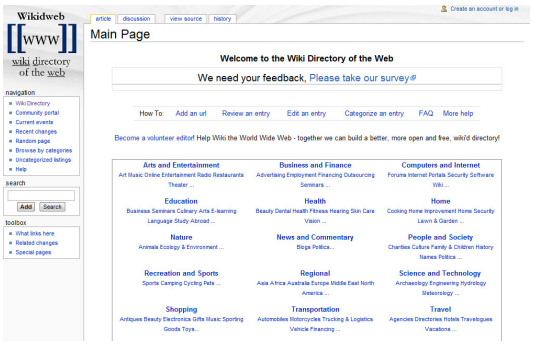
RoAsk
URL: http://www.roask.com/



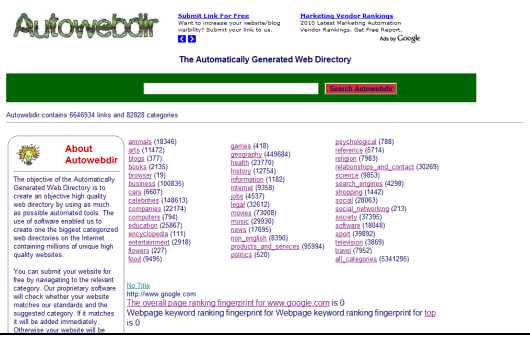
viesearch
URL: http://viesearch.com/



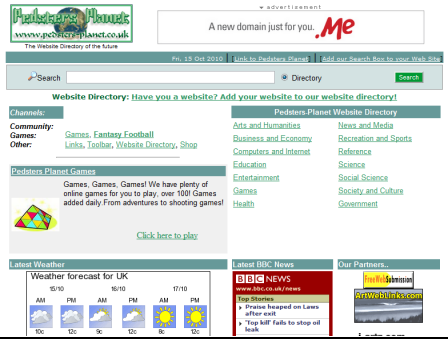
Wikidweb
URL: http://www.wikidweb.com/

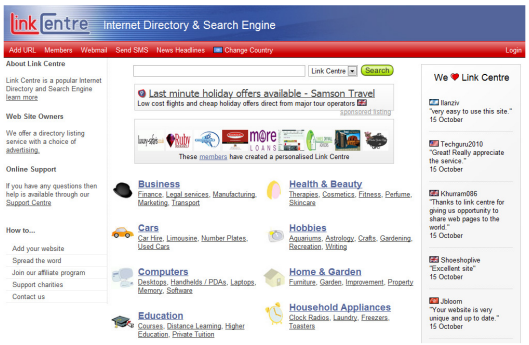


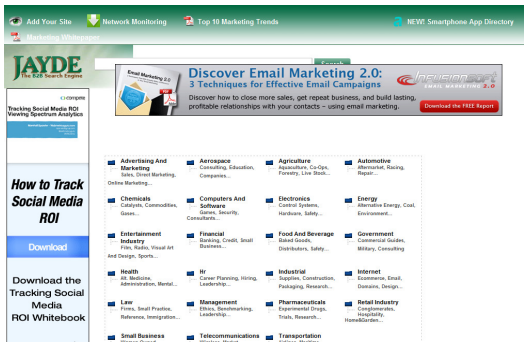
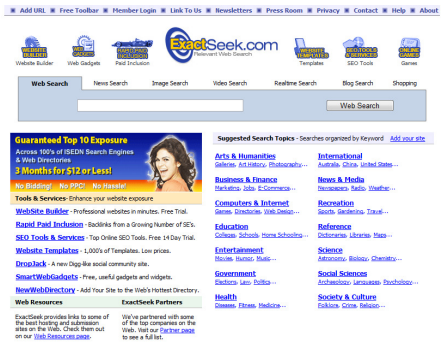
Autowebdir
URL: http://www.autowebdir.com/



Pedster's Planet
URL: http://www.pedsters-planet.co.uk/



Net Insert URL: http://www.netinsert.com/	**Link Centre** URL: http://linkcentre.com/
	

Jayde URL: http://www.jayde.com/main.html	**Exact Seek** URL: http://www.exactseek.com/
	

Conclusion

As you can see, creating a Google Places listing isn't rocket science but it does take a fair amount of work. The more complex bit comes when you are trying to increase your Place Page ranking.

While having a Google Places listing is imperative, it won't do you much good if it can't be found for terms (aka keyword phrases) relevant to your business!

We specialize in helping business owners, like you, build a strong and meaningful presence on the web. We are experts in optimizing both websites and Google Places listings and can help you get new business as a direct result.

If you'd like to see how we can help, give us a call at: (425) 760-5041 or visit: http://www.PowerfulMarketing.info/blog/contact/ and complete our online form to request more information.

We look forward to talking with you and will do our best to help you increase your web exposure, get new business and outperform your competitors!

About The Author

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