



## Guide to Google Places & Local Search

The local search environment has been in a constant state of flux, and the only truly safe assumption to be made is that Local search will continue to change frequently for the foreseeable future.

Google and Bing are currently the only two independently maintained local search engines. Both maintain unique indexes of local business information. As of October 2010, only 2 million businesses have claimed Places page in Google. The rest of the data is coming from data aggregators, some of which you have never heard of and would never discover on your own.

These aggregators often contain outdated and inaccurate information, which must be updated and cleaned up to ensure that your primary listings are fully optimized and maintain high rankings.

Until late October of 2010, Google Places was a completely independent system from the organic search results we have all been accustomed to viewing for many years now. In the previous format, Google had been displaying 7 businesses on a single map at the top of the page. Now they are displaying a hybrid result that combines data from both Local and organic. These changes to Google are the most significant shift to affect local business search results in many years.

**It is very important that Places Pages are claimed by the business owner only**, never a third party or outside marketing company. It is a very simple 10-minute process to claim and update a Google Places profile.

Especially for anyone who has moved offices, changed phone numbers, or used tracking phone numbers in the past, it's critical that you hunt down any outdated NAP (name, address phone) information on the web and clean it up.

You will hear a lot about **citations** in reference to optimizing Places pages. **Citations are authority listings on other websites which share the same NAP information as your Places page.** You do not need to pay for good citations but may choose to invest in specific business directories known to be sources of authoritative citation information, such as the BBB directory or Citysearch.

### Known factors which affect inclusion in "Places" results:

1. Business owner has claimed and completed the listing (*to claim yours, go to Google Places and follow the process*)
2. Business category is set correctly
3. Business is within the city limits
4. Distance from the centroid of the city
5. Number of reviews and star rating
6. Number of authoritative NAP citations from other sources

A maximum of seven (7) hybrid business listing will appear integrated throughout the first page, with a map in the upper right corner.

Search Instant is on ▼

About 489,000 results (0.27 seconds) Advanced search

**NJ Plastic Surgeon** Ads  
[www.AssociatesInPlasticSurgery.com](http://www.AssociatesInPlasticSurgery.com) Premier **Plastic Surgeon** Group in **New Jersey**. Financing Available.  
[Show map of 1150 Amboy Avenue, Edison, NJ 08837](#)

**Top Plastic Surgeon in NJ**  
[BerletPlasticSurgery.com](http://BerletPlasticSurgery.com) Board Certified Dr. Berlet is a Highly Experienced **Plastic Surgeon**.

**NJ Plastic Surgeon**  
[www.GartnerPlasticSurgery.com/NJ](http://www.GartnerPlasticSurgery.com/NJ) "Double Board Certified **Surgeon**" **NJ Plastic Surgery** Specialist (NJ)

**Plastic Surgery New Jersey | Cosmetic Surgery Northern NJ ...** ☆ - 7 visits - Nov 2  
Board certified physicians providing cosmetic and reconstructive **surgery** services includes breast augmentation, body contouring, face-neck **surgery** and hair ...  
Dr. Barry DiBernardo - Contact Us - Patient Testimonials  
[www.newjerseyplasticsurgery.com/](http://www.newjerseyplasticsurgery.com/) - Cached - Similar

**A** 29 Park Street, Montclair, NJ - (973) 509-2000  
"What a great experience! Caring knowledgeable staff. This office provides the ..." - vitals.com (6)  
[Visit our website](#) Sponsored

**Plastic Surgery New Jersey | Parker Center for Plastic Surgery** ☆  
Parker Center for **Plastic Surgery, New Jersey**, offers cosmetic surgery procedures for breast, tummy, face, etc. Explore our website to learn about the ...  
[www.parkercenter.net/](http://www.parkercenter.net/) - Cached - Similar

**B** 122 E Ridgewood Ave, Paramus, NJ  
(201) 967-1212  
vitals.com (11) - insiderpages.com (5)

**Plastic Surgery | New Jersey** ☆  
Welcome to the website of the **Plastic Surgery** Group, located in **New Jersey**.  
[www.psg1.com/](http://www.psg1.com/) - Cached - Similar

**C** 37 N Fullerton Ave # 1, Montclair, NJ  
(973) 233-1933

**New Jersey Plastic Surgeon, William K. Boss - Breast Augmentation ...** ☆  
Certified **New Jersey plastic surgeons** experienced in all fields of plastic surgery, such as liposuction, breast augmentation, Botox injection, ...  
Laser Liposuction - Cool Lift - Rhinoplasty - Mini Tummy Tuck  
[www.mynewjerseyplasticsurgeon.com/](http://www.mynewjerseyplasticsurgeon.com/) - Cached - Similar

**D** 20 Prospect Avenue, Hackensack, NJ  
(201) 488-1916  
vitals.com (2)

★★★★★ 14 reviews  
[Place page](#)

★★★★★ 18 reviews  
[Place page](#)

[Place page](#)

2 reviews  
[Place page](#)

2010 Google Maps data ©2010 Google

**Plastic Surgeon NJ**  
Frank J. Ferraro, MD Board Certified **Plastic Surgeon**  
[pssnj.com](http://pssnj.com)  
New Jersey

**Plastic Surgeon New Jersey**  
Experienced **NJ Plastic Surgeon**. Board-Certified. **New 3-D** Imaging.  
[www.breslowmd.com](http://www.breslowmd.com)

**Locate A Plastic Surgeon**  
Board Certified **Plastic Surgeons** Find a **Surgeon** in Your Zip Code  
[www.PlasticSurgery.org](http://www.PlasticSurgery.org)

**Dr. Edmund Kwan**  
Top **Surgeon** Specializing In Cosmetic **Surgery**. Serving NYC & NJ.  
[www.DrEdmundKwan.com](http://www.DrEdmundKwan.com)  
302 E 72nd St # 1, New York, NY

**Facial Plastic Surgeon**

Another format displays three listings, and a third format displays one listing in what is known as the “authoritative one box.” The “one box” may appear in some scenarios if you search for your own business name.

### Three box format:

botox seattle × Search Instant is on ▼

About 471,000 results (0.23 seconds) [Advanced search](#)

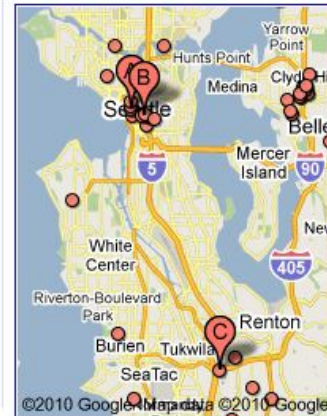
**BOTOX® Cosmetic** Ad  
www.BOTOXCosmetic.com (onabotulinumtoxinA) Official site. Learn More about BOTOX® Cosmetic.  
Click to see full safety and prescribing information, including boxed warning. [More info](#)

**Places for botox near Seattle, WA**

- A** **Facial Surgery Center of Seattle** ☆ - ★★★★★ 7 reviews - Place page  
www.drjonov.com - 509 Olive Way #1331, Seattle - (206) 624-0852
- B** **J. Timothy Heffernan, MD** ☆ - 2 reviews - Place page  
www.drjimheffernan.com - Suite 1190, 1229 Madison Street, Seattle - (206) 215-2052
- C** **Brite Smile/Brite Skin Med Spa** ☆ - 1 review - Place page  
www.britesmile.com - 989 South Center Mall, Tukwila, Washington - (206) 575-8300

[More results near Seattle, WA »](#)

**Seattle Botox - Naficy Rejuvenation Center in Bellevue & Seattle** ☆  
Seattle Botox Specialists located in downtown Bellevue with experienced staff and flexible



### Authoritative One Box:


overlake plastic surgeons × Search

About 14,500 results (0.25 seconds) [Advanced search](#)

**BOTOX® Cosmetic** Ads  
www.BOTOXCosmetic.com (onabotulinumtoxinA) Official site. Learn More about BOTOX® Cosmetic.  
Click to see full safety and prescribing information, including boxed warning. [More info](#)

[Just \\$995 per area](#)  
www.SonoBello.com/Liposuction Our Board Certified Doctors will create an amazing new look for you.

**Bellevue Plastic Surgeon Dr. Michael A. Leff | Bellevue and ...** ☆  
At **Overlake Plastic Surgery** in Bellevue we are concerned with restoring physical function and beauty. We look at patients as unique individuals, ...  
www.drleff.com/ - Cached - Similar

 **Overlake Plastic Surgeons** ☆  
[Place page](#)  
1600 116th Avenue NE  
Bellevue, WA 98004  
(425) 454-5133  
Bus: 116th Ave NE & NE 12th St  
Get directions - Is this accurate?  
Open Weekdays 9am-5pm  
[Write a review](#)

## **Factor 1: Business owner has claimed and completed the listing**

### **Tips for completing & optimizing your Google Places profile.**

1. First of all you have to claim your profile! If you can find yourself on the map, then you can claim your page. You can also google “Google Places” and follow the steps.
2. Set up your Places listing(s) in your authoritative Google account with your Analytics, Webmaster Tools, AdWords, etc. Try not to use a personal account for managing your map listings.

### **What you write when you complete your profile is very important!**

- Complete all of the fields.
- Use your contact or location page as the website link.
- Use your official office phone number.
- Add your logo and photos
- Link your YouTube videos.

### **Your business phone number is the #1 authenticity signal (as important as your thumbprint or Social Security number!)**

The main phone number for your business should be consistent across all directory listings, and tracking phone numbers should be avoided at all cost, because the phone number is the one unique identifier that these local search engines are depending on for verification and trustworthiness.

If you must use a tracking phone number, ensure that the tracking phone number can't be crawled by search spiders by hiding it in an image or un-indexable Javascript to avoid conflict with your NAP data.

### **Profile Setup Don'ts:**

1. Do **not** use extra keywords in your business name – just your real business name.
2. Do **not** use the same phone number if you have multiple locations. Each location should have a unique telephone number.
3. Do **not** “keyword stuff” your business description.

### **Verification is required.**

Once you are finished, you must verify with Google that you are really you. They will ask you to verify your identity by telephone or postcard. This is the most important step and cannot be skipped.

## **Factor 2: Set your business category correctly**

After the first category, which is required and should be set on “Plastic Surgeon,” you can create custom categories, (ie “breast augmentation” or “tummy tuck”)

Choose categories wisely and do not keyword stuff here – meaning don’t use city name in your category and don’t go overboard!

It would be wisest to choose your highest revenue generating procedures for your custom categories, or the procedures you wish to dominate in your market.

Category: \*

Which categories (up to 5) best describe your business?  
Ex: Dentist, Wedding Photographer, Thai Restaurant

Category: \*

Category: \*

Category: \*

Category: \*

## **Factor 3 and 4: Business is within the city limits, and distance from the centroid**

If your office is not within the city limits, you may not appear on the map for big searches.

The centroid is where the search engines have decided the middle of your city is. You can find the centroid in your city by typing just your city name into Google Maps and see where the pushpin is located.

*In the image to your right, the “centroid” of Seattle.*



## **Factor 5: Number of reviews and star rating**

Ask your patients to write reviews on your Places page, but remember to do this sparingly and not all at once. A flood of reviews on your page all at the same time can be suspicious to Google and they may remove all of your reviews.

## **Google Places Reviews**

Users with Google accounts can post reviews directly on your Places page, and they will appear almost instantly.

Business owners also have the ability to respond directly to reviews. If you get a review on your Places page that you’d like to respond to, log in as you would to edit your page and look for the “Respond to Reviews” section on the Dashboard.

Reviews are also aggregated into your Places page from other sources like Citysearch, Healthgrades, Vitals, and others. You cannot edit or respond to aggregated reviews, but know that Google’s policy for reviews is changing quickly and constantly and that you may be able to do more in the future.

## **Factor 6: Number of NAP citations from other sources**

The more references (citations) there are to a business on the web, the more trustworthy it is to the Local search engines. This doesn't affect regular organic rankings but DOES improve your appearance in map listings.

There are three very important master data providers which fuel a wide variety of local search websites, business directories, GPS, map software, etc. All 3 of these data providers feed all secondary providers via direct feed or crawl.

**Localeze** is probably the most important, because it provides NAP data to Facebook and Twitter.

If you have seen bad data online, it may be coming from one of these providers.

### **How to get more Citations**

Claim your business listings on any reputable directory website that you can find, and correct any inaccuracies – but **try not to pay for updates!** There is almost always a free way to update bad info.

### **A few common citation sources:**

<b>Citysearch/CityGrid</b>	<a href="http://www.citygridmedia.com/contact.html">http://www.citygridmedia.com/contact.html</a>
<b>Merchant Circle</b>	<a href="http://www.merchantcircle.com/corporate/landing/signup.html">http://www.merchantcircle.com/corporate/landing/signup.html</a>
<b>Kudzu</b>	<a href="http://www.kudzu.com/">http://www.kudzu.com/</a>
<b>BBB</b>	Find your local BBB and become accredited at <a href="http://www.bbb.org/us/find-a-bbb/">http://www.bbb.org/us/find-a-bbb/</a>
<b>Register on Angie's List</b>	<a href="http://company.angieslist.com/Visitor/AngiesList101/">http://company.angieslist.com/Visitor/AngiesList101/</a>
<b>Monitor Angie's List for free</b>	<a href="https://company.angieslist.com/Registration/Registration.aspx">https://company.angieslist.com/Registration/Registration.aspx</a>
<b>HealthGrades</b>	<a href="http://www.healthgrades.com/profile-manager/">http://www.healthgrades.com/profile-manager/</a>
<b>Vitals.com</b>	<a href="http://www.vitals.com/v/?v=user/show_login">http://www.vitals.com/v/?v=user/show_login</a>
<b>Vimo</b>	<a href="http://www.vimo.com/doctor/">http://www.vimo.com/doctor/</a>

**To find any incorrect listings,** Google your name + old street address or old phone number to weed them out.

## **3 MOST IMPORTANT LOCAL BUSINESS DATA PROVIDERS**

**Localeze:** <http://localeze.com/>

**InfoUSA:** <http://expressupdateusa.com/home.aspx>

**Axciom:** <http://www.mybusinesslistingmanager.com/>

Go through one by one looking for ways to update incorrect listings. Be careful not to sign up for anything that looks suspicious. You may want to use a secondary email address for managing these listings to keep the management of this process self-contained. Be careful! If something seems fishy, it probably is.

## Report Dashboard and Email reports

You can log in to your dashboard anytime and see how your listing is doing!

Google Places will also email you a report and a newsletter once a month to tell you how you're doing and give you valuable tips for improving your page.

The image shows a screenshot of a Google Places dashboard on the left and an email report on the right.

**Dashboard (Left):**

- Navigation: Dashboard, Offers, Billing
- Location: New Jersey Plastic Surgery - Barry DiBernardo, MD
- Activity Graphs:
  - Impressions (blue line): Fluctuates between approximately 80 and 150 over the period from Oct 7, 2010, to Oct 28, 2010.
  - Actions (green line): Fluctuates between approximately 10 and 30 over the same period.
- Totals:
  - 2136 impressions (How many times users saw your business listing as a local search result)
  - 275 actions (How many times users showed interest in your business listing)
    - 29 Clicks for more info on Maps
    - 32 Clicks for driving directions
    - 214 Clicks to your website
- Post to your place page: Includes a "Post" button, "Expires in 30 days", and "160" views.
- Respond to reviews: "Owners can post a public response to reviews by Google users."
- Your business info:
  - 100% complete
  - 29 Park Street, Montclair, NJ 07042, (973) 509-2000, http://www.newjerseyplasticsurgery.com/
  - Description: Our dedication to patients and our profession is one of many reasons why people from all over the United States and the world choose New Jersey Plastic Surgery.
  - Payment: Cash, Check, American Express, MasterCard, Visa, Financing
  - Laser Treatments: SmartLipo MPX, Ulthera, Zeltiq, Fotofacial, Tattoo Removal, Laser Hair Removal
  - Injectables: Botox, Radiesse, Restylane, Perlane.

**Email Report (Right):**

- Header: Google places
- Salutation: Dear Plastic Surgery Seattle,
- Text: "With the holidays approaching, we invite you to check out the latest tips, tools, and resources for reaching your customers:"
- Section: "Make your listing stand out with Google Tags"
  - Text: "Start your free trial now. If you would like to speak with a sales representative, please call (800) 449-7686"
- Section: "Get your business ready for the holidays"
  - Text: "Here are a few quick and easy ways Google Places can help your business make the most of this holiday season:"
  - List:
    - Create a coupon highlighting holiday specials
    - Link to a menu of holiday offers and prices
    - Make your business listing stand out with Google Tags
    - Update your holiday business hours
    - Write a post to engage with your customers
  - Text: "Read more >> and Sign in now to update your listing >>"

These websites are terrific sources for reading about what's really going on in Local Search. Before you take the word of someone who's trying to sell you something, read up from the experts and arm yourself with the truth.

**More Local Search Resources:**

Important Business Listing Attributes: <http://getlisted.org/resources/important-business-listing-attributes.aspx>

Local Search Glossary: <http://getlisted.org/resources/glossary.aspx>

David Mihm's blog: <http://www.davidmihm.com/blog/>

Mike Blumenthal's blog: <http://blumenthals.com/blog/>

Google blog: <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/04/introducing-google-places.html>

Google Places Help: <http://www.google.com/support/places/?hl=en&rd=1>

Google Places videos: <http://www.youtube.com/googleplaces>