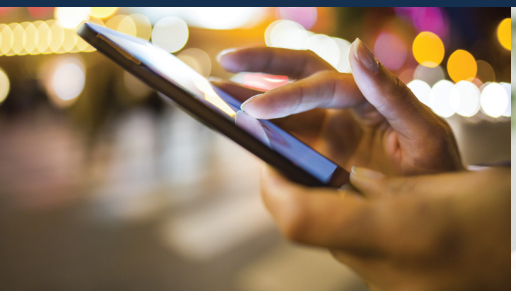
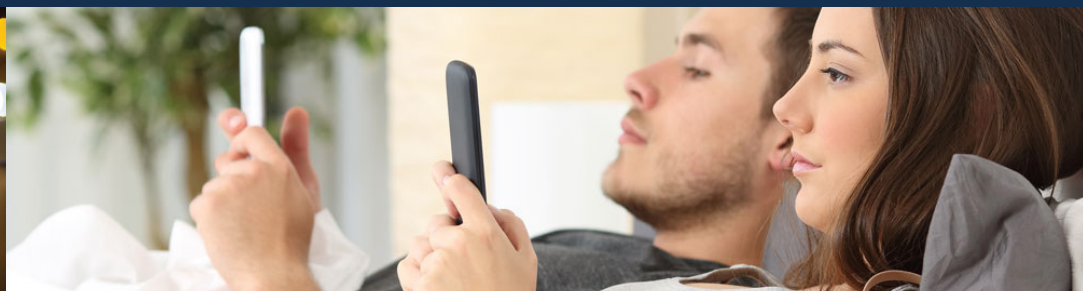
eSalesHub
Local Search Perfected

7 Facts about local search that will blow your mind

including how many people actually search local on Google





Local search is not a new concept – Yellow pages, after all, has been around in one form or another for a long time.

What is new is the way people are searching and how Google is adopting its algorytham to include more local search results than ever before.

2013 was a watershed year for local search. Google launched its Hummingbird update in August 2013 (confirmed by Google in September 2013 and that it had already been running for a month) which wasn't so much as an update, but a sea-change in how the algorithm worked. Unlike panda and penguin, which were introduced to reduce spam in the results, Hummingbird was a complete overhaul of the entire Google algorithm. As MOZ put it at the time "if you consider the Google algorithm as an engine, Panda and Penguin are algorithm changes that were like putting a new part in the engine such as a filter or a fuel pump. But, Hummingbird wasn't just a new part; it was a completely new engine."

The idea behind the Hummingbird update was to better understand the users search query, particularly for longer, location based search queries using conversational search terms. Bill Slawski does a great job of explaining the Hummingbird patent that Google registered. A simpler definition is that before Hummingbird, you'd type in "Doncaster Electrician", "Birmingham Plumber" or "gas engineer near me", and get a set of results that combined localised Adwords Ads (in some cases) along with more 'national' non-location specific results in the natural search other than the map pack. But with Hummingbird, Google transformed the search results by placing more importance on search intention and started presenting more localised content in their natural search results – the birth of true local search.

All sounds good right? "But why is this important to me as I look after a national brand?"

Well you could be missing out on 46% of search volumes if you don't target local search...

Not only is it now a big segment of search, but users behave very differently when they search locally to a more generic term. So if you don't include it in your online strategy and adopt your tactics to get the most out of local search user habits, you won't get a return.

We've put these facts together so you can understand the importance of local search in your overall strategy.

Fact 1: 46% of all Search is Local

Its been speculated for a long time that local search is a big part of searches – but 46% – wow!

2007 was the year Google started to insert map packs into the search results, starting the search results on a path towards local search. But local search was still in its infancy.

After three years of the map packs, Search Engine Land reported that Google estimated local search to be 20% of all searches. From 2010 to 2012, Google put a lot of effort to get the map packs inserted into more 'local' search results and getting your business ranked on maps became the go-to tactic for local search. Then in 2012 Search Engine Land update the figure to 43% based on Ad network Chitika research. By categorising keywords like "near me", "in boston" and "around Birmingham" they could see that 43% of search from Google was local.

In 2016 this figure was updated to 46% after further research conducted by Business2Community.com.

By 2020 this figure is expected to rise even further with the proliferation on mobile devices. It certainly seems that with more and more searches being conducted by mobile device, the growth of local search will be fuelled for years to come.

FACT 2: Up to 88% of Mobile Searches are local

Google confirmed in their 2016 research "Understanding consumers local search behaviour" that up to 88% of searches on mobile are local and as user search habits become more intricate and specific to their location.

To provide organisation with a better understing of the mind-set and behaviours of consumers when they perform local searches, Google partnered with Ipsos MediaCT and Purchased® to run two custom research studies. Threy recruited people who conduct searches on their smartphone at least a few times per week and the results were pretty staggering.

FACT 3: Local searchers buy – 18% converted to sale compared with 7% of non-local searchers.

Google's local search research also confirmed that local searches have more purchase intent and are further down the purchase funnel than non-local searches. "Local searchers are a prime audience for advertisers because those who search with local intent are more inclined to act," stated Google. Their research indicated that 18% of local searches turned into a purchase, where as only 7% of non-local searches turned into a purchase. With more than double the conversion, getting local search to work can dramatically increase your lead to sales conversion. Infact across all our clients we see significant increases in conversion from locally-created leads when compared to national-led activity. Its not that we are doing anything different, its our belief that searchers who put in a location as part of their search show more intent to purchase, and as Google say, are further down the purchase funnel.

FACT 4: 4 out of 5 Consumers prefer to act on a local ad, even if its not a local product or service they are looking for.

We often get asked the question "But why do I need local search in my strategy when we don't deliver our product locally?" Even if you don't deliver your product through a service locally through a retail outlet, 4 out of 5 consumers still expect the ads they see to be localised to them. Think back to the best direct mail campaigns you've seen – considered old school, but by tailoring the message and content to a persons home address increased conversion rates. Search is no different. The one hook Google has to segment you as a user and target you with relevant content s your location; its on the bottom of every search you do. So even if you don't deliver your product through a local centre, customer still expect you to at least acknowledge their location and make your ad about your product for their location for increased click-through rates.

FACT 5: 71% of Local Searches on a mobile results in a call.

This fact often surprises people as most believe the sales funnel to be dominated by online transactions. But with most users searching on a mobile, a mobile devices their primary function is to make phone call. And how difficult is it to complete a form or transaction on a mobile unless the site is really well optimised? The theory extends further when you think of purchases with multiple variables. Its easy to buy car tyres online, you just pick the size, make and price and purchase. But with a car repair, possible which is an emergency purchase, you'll want to know if the mechanic is available and when he can see you car. You can't always provide this information online and with customer expectations for instant service and results, why push the user down a journey they don't want to go down and instead give 71% of users what they want – a number to call.

FACT 6: 88% of users read reviews to determine the quality of a local business.

Everybody knows that online reviews are an important part of your strategy, but for local search, they are even more important as users become less brand focus and more "if it meets my demands I am buying" decision process. Search Engine Land confirmed that "88% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations." To understand this, we need to explore why someone is going online and searching locally in the first place. Users potentially go online and search locally because; a) they don't know a supplier themselves, b) they haven't had a recommendation from anybody else, c) they've got a requirement. Google makes it so easy nowadays to find companies for any service or product, that the first one a users finds that meets their buying criteria (it might be price, it might be speed of service, it might be location) they'll buy. But if they don't know your brand or have never experienced your service or product, what can edge them closer to buying from you? Whilst Search Engine Land states that 88& pf users trust online reviews, we have found with each client implementation that sales performance can be effected by as much as 28% by not having an effective online review strategy implemented.

FACT 7: Some companies only target 5% of search users – local search is your opportunity to gain market share.

From our own research we often find that some companies only target 5% of search by implementing a PPC/AdWords strategy to local search because getting organic rankings on Google for local search results is often deemed too hard and complicated. You could argue that on local search, ppc clicks could amount to 20% of all clicks because the click ration on ppc can be higher on a non-branded search query. But even with the most effective and biggest PPC budget, you are not going to be able to get to 100% of those users – we've yet to see an account that's got a page impression of 100% of searches. So the maths just doesn't stack up if you want to dominate local search. Without organic rankings, its going to be difficult to make local search a meaningful sales channel for your company.

Do you have more questions?

Our goal in writing this article was to have a resource to point people to when they had basic questions abut local search and why its an important part of your online strategy. In talking to companies large and small I realised that many people outside of the SEO world don't always know of the size of local search because the Google AdWords Keyword Tool doesn't really pick-up local keyword search terms and is often inaccurate.

Do you have more questions about local search? If so, I'd be happy to address them in the comments. I also would love for those of you who are experienced with dealing with local search strategies to comment as well.