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What Is Google My Business?

Google My Business is a vitally important tool for any inflatable hire business owner who wants more local customers for their hire business. Understanding the fundamentals of this platform will increase your chances of being found in *local* and *mobile* search results.

As a small business looking to connect with more local consumers, *these* search results are the most valuable ones you can pursue. Getting ranked locally is also a lot easier and less time consuming than attempting to compete with the entire world. Not only that, but focusing on local rankings will also help you reach geo-targeted consumers who are more likely to become real customers.

Google My Business is a new dashboard which replaces Google Places for Business and Google+ Local. Google has experimented with both platforms in the past, which has left many business owners feeling confused and frustrated.

The new Google My Business dashboard will eliminate this confusion by allowing you to manage your company information across all of Google's platforms, including Search, Maps, and Google+. It's a one-stop solution that should help you simplify the whole listing management process in the going forward.

Accessing the dashboard is easy. You can do it from the Google My Business platform on your PC, or you can download the Google My Business App for the Android iOS and use it on your mobile device. Either method will allow you to access and control all of the dashboard functions.

While I can't promise you that Google won't change things up in the future, I *can* promise that this integrated system makes things a lot easier right *now*. So here are some step-by-step instructions to help you become familiar with the Google My Business platform.

How to Get Started on Google My Business

Getting started is simple.

1. First, visit the following link: http://www.google.com/business.

2. If you already have a Google Places or Google+ Local account, just sign in. Your listing should have automatically been upgraded to Google My Business. You'll be taken to the new dashboard, which I'll show you in a moment (see Step 6).

3. If you've never done anything with Google before, then you'll need to choose the "Get on Google" button. You'll be taken to the following screen:
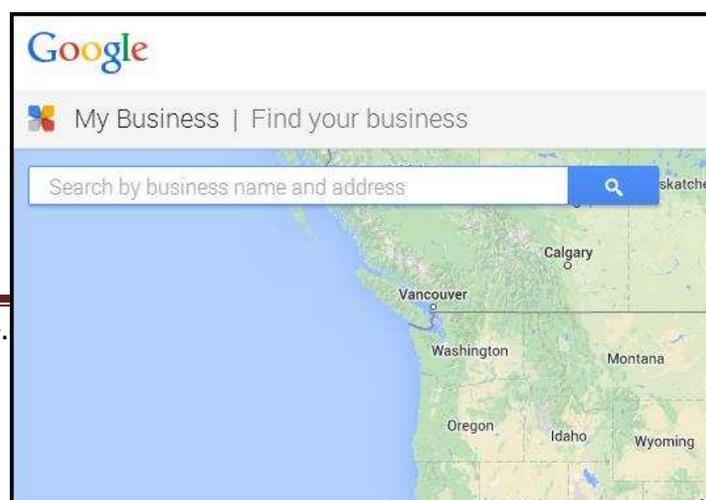
Simply search for your business name and address; there is a good chance that Google will already have your company listed. That is because they have aggregated information from a lot of different sources to populate their platform. However, there is no guarantee that the information is correct. So this is why you need to complete your profile, verify it, and optimize it.

4. If your business is already in the system you can click on the listing to claim it. You'll see a box that looks like this:
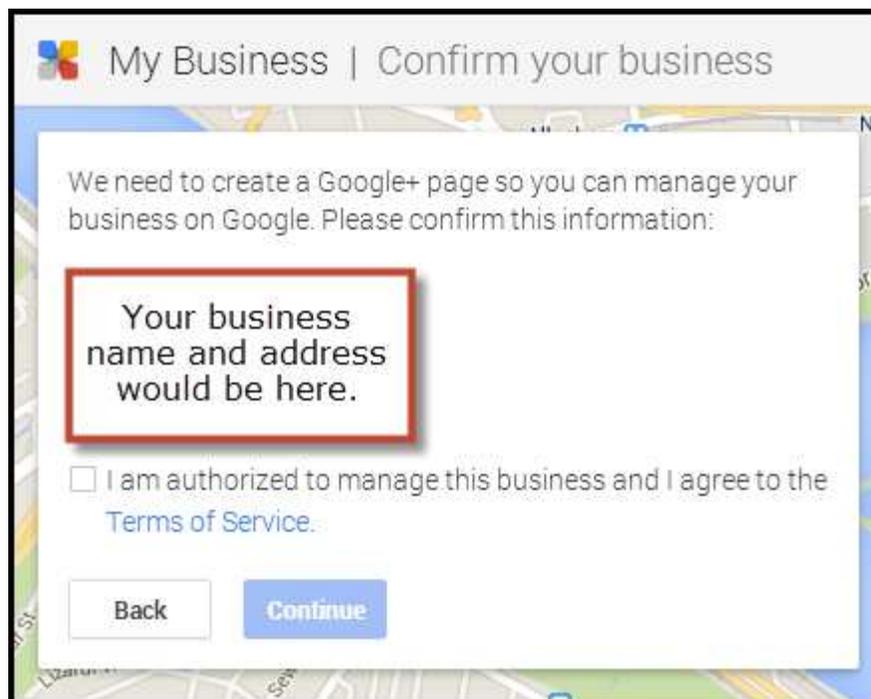
Obviously, Google doesn't want just anyone claiming listings; so you will have to verify that you're the rightful owner of the business. Google will

either offer you the option to do this right away, over the phone, or they'll want to send a post card with a special code. You won't be able to access all of the features of Google My Places until you complete this verification process.

5. If your business is *not* in the system, you'll have to add it. Just click on the option that says, "None of these match, add my business." You'll be taken to this very simple form.

Fill out your information. Make sure that you are **100% accurate** as you do so. You'll want to use your legal name, your local physical address, and your exact business phone number. All of this information should be entered the exact same way everywhere online, including your website and other local listing sites. For instance, if you routinely type out the word "Street" then make sure you do so here and everywhere else. Don't use "St." If you're ABC Business, LLC., then include the LLC. All of this will matter when it's time to build up your rankings later.

6. Once you've logged in, you'll be able to view your dashboard. You can access all of the Google My Business Features here. As you can see, you can easily access reviews, insights about your page's performance, the Google Adwords Express feature, the Google+ social media platform and YouTube by interacting with this menu.
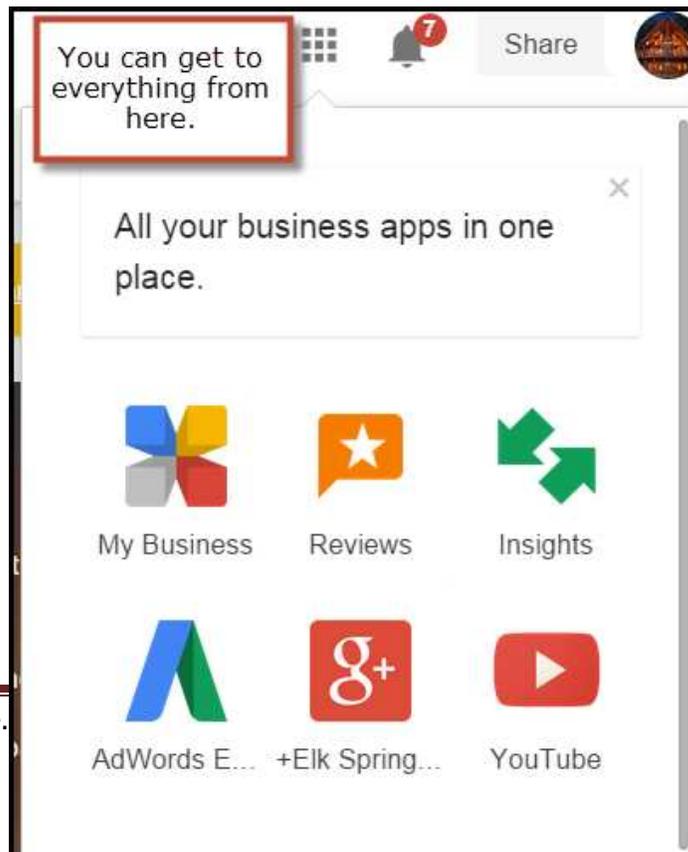
FEATURES

Google My Business offers several new and existing features which new users, as well as veteran users of Google Places or Google+ Local, should be aware of. Once you login to the new dashboard, you can take a closer look at how each of these features work together to boost your overall online presence and help you save time.

Pages Type

No small business is the same, so Google gives you some choices when it comes to setting up your local page - based on your business type or industry. You can choose between the Store Front, The Service Area, and the Brand page.

If you already had Google+ Local set up then you should have already been upgraded to the appropriate page type. You can change it by editing your business information.

Virtual Tours

This feature lets you add video so that you can give customers a view of your business in action. Using this feature is a great way to reach out and connect with potential customers. Once people get a behind the scenes

sneak peek into your company, many of them will trust you more and feel more comfortable doing business with you.

Reviews

Google My Business makes it much easier to deal with customer reviews. As you may know from previous experience with Google+ Local, reviews play a major role in your ability to rank in Google's Local Search results.

Reviews also matter to your reputation. It's hard to get someone to try a new establishment if it has a steady stream of bad reviews. So it pays to encourage your customers to leave reviews and for you to engage and respond to reviews (both negative and positive).

Wish a bad review could go away? You can't remove reviews; only Google can do that, which is highly unlikely under normal circumstances. But you *can* respond to them. From your Dashboard, click "Manage Reviews." You'll see a page that looks like this one.
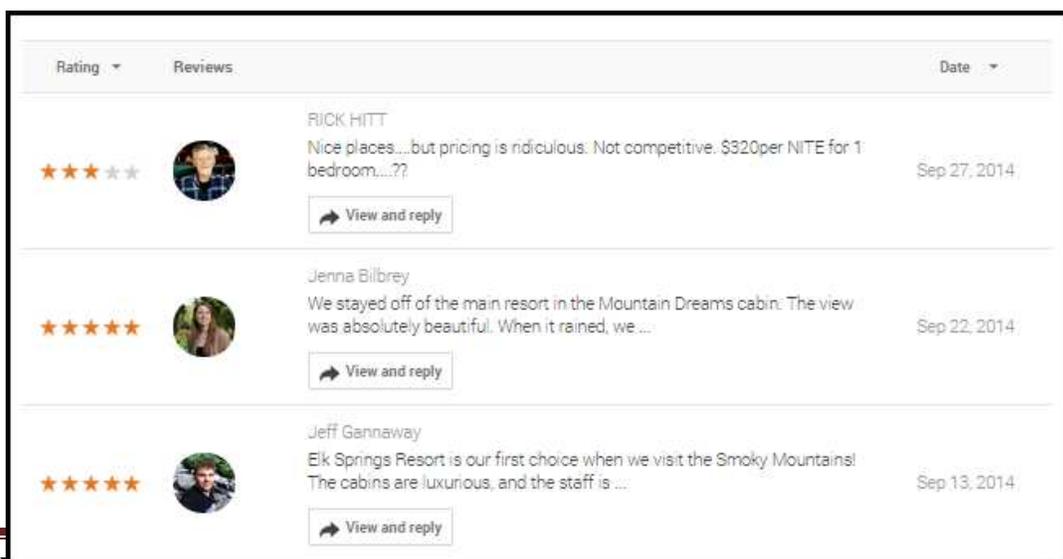
As you can see, you can respond to each review by choosing the "View and Reply" button. Often, this is a very good idea, since it shows people that you actually care about customer service, and that you're willing to engage.

You can thank people for their good reviews, and you can try to work things out with those who have taken the time to leave complaints. Either way, it's far easier than the old process, which involved many more steps.

You can also take a look at review analytics.
This is an incredibly beneficial tool, as it helps you monitor your reputation, not just on Google, but all over the web. It tells you where all of your reviews are coming from, so that you can check them out and respond to them as necessary on other sites.

There's a good chance that Google is using the sum total of all of this review data to make decisions about how it will rank you. In the past, it looked like reviews on other sites had only a very small impact on your local rankings.

However, this report indicates that reviews on other sites might start playing a larger role in the algorithm. Time will tell. In the meantime, gathering reviews continues to be an important part of the small business owner's marketing strategy. So I would recommend that most business owners focus on getting customers to write the bulk of those reviews into Google My Business.

Insights

The Insights feature allows you to access analytics reports and data so that you can understand how your Google My Business profile is performing. You can view the number of views your pages are getting, the number of times people are clicking through to your primary website, and the number of times people ask for driving directions so that they can visit your establishment.

You can also view engagement on each of your social posts. If a post is performing particularly well, you'll know that you should use more content like that to drive additional engagement. If a post is performing poorly, you can adjust your social strategy appropriately.

Finally, you can get some insight on your Google+ followers. As you gather followers, Google will attempt to gather data on where those people are coming from, and who they are. If you aren't getting many followers, this data may not show up. But if you are, you should see their location, gender, and age. This data can help you plan more audience-appropriate content for your Google+ profile and other marketing efforts.

AdWords Express

If you use PPC campaigns to drive traffic to your business website, you'll really enjoy this more user-friendly AdWords interface. Before Google My Business you would have had to go to a separate login page to access AdWords.

Now you can create, launch, activate, and deactivate ads in the same place that you are managing the rest of your Google marketing efforts. You can easily track your ad's performance from the AdWords dashboard, as well.
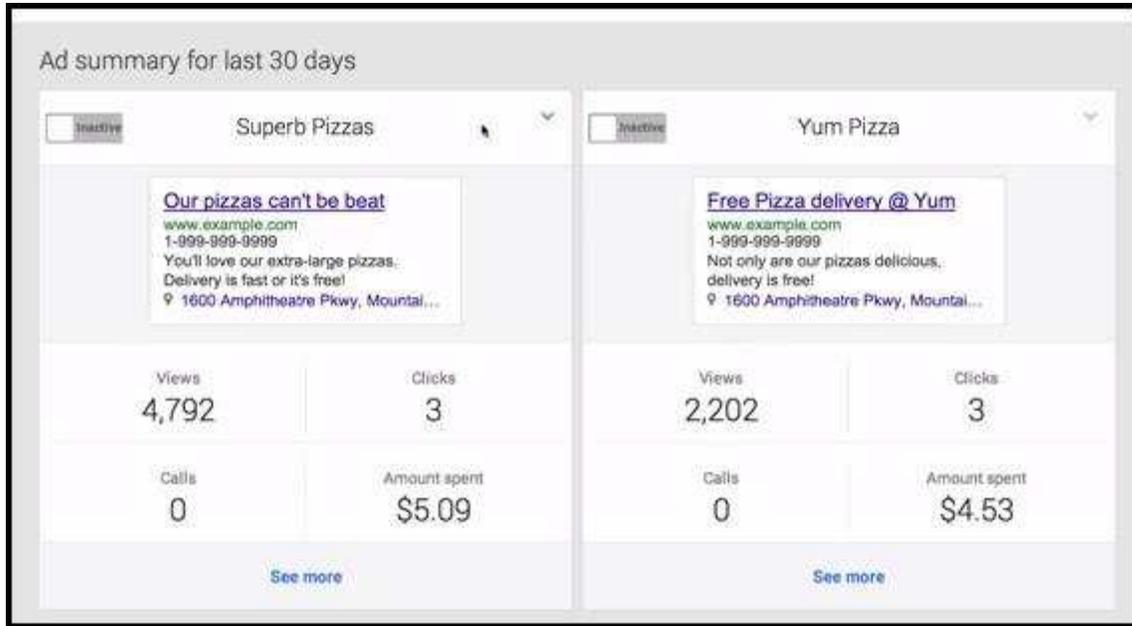
From here, you can make some decisions—are you getting a large enough return on your investment? Do you need to deactivate some campaigns? All of this can be done from the drop down arrow next to the ad name. This will give you a menu that includes options for changing your ad's headline or editing the text, deactivating the ad, or removing it entirely.

Engage and Interact with Google+ Followers

You'll find that this feature functions pretty much as it always did.
You'll see a quick social update feature right under your dashboard header.
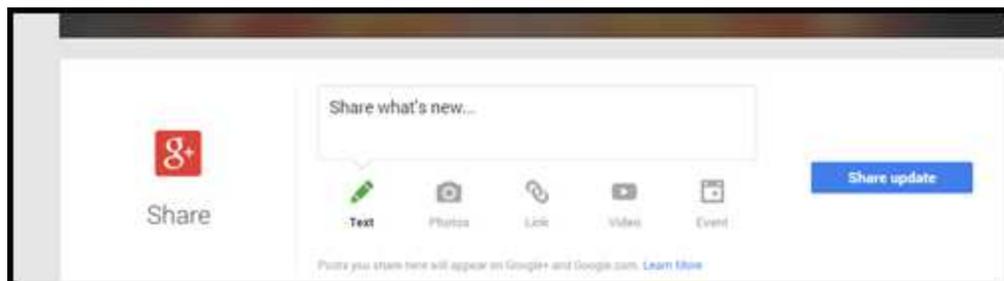
You can simply type and share. However, you will have to get off of your dashboard if you want to interact with the greater social platform. To do this, you will select the Google+ icon on your menu.

By the way, if you haven't been using the Google+ social profile, you should really consider it. Google+ offers a distinct advantage over every other social profile out there because Google includes the content of your posts in the search results. This offers yet another way to get your business seen and heard in an increasingly crowded marketplace. Google+ has become just as important to the average business owner as Facebook, so don't neglect it.

Bulk Upload Tool

There is one more tool I want to share with you. This one isn't as readily apparent on your dashboard as the others.

The Bulk Upload Tool allows a business to easily manage information for ten or more locations. The early Google+ Local platform did not provide business owners with multiple locations any easy or intuitive way to manage these locations. Google My Business has corrected this problem.

You will visit http://www.google.com/local/manage to begin using this tool. You will enter each location's information into an Excel spreadsheet using this template. Then you will upload your spreadsheet. Make sure you read through all of Google's quality guidelines before attempting to do this, or you may experience verification problems.

Tips for Using Google My Business

Google can be a bit picky at times. If you want to use Google My Business successfully, then you'll need to employ several best practices to get the most out of the platform. Each of these pointers will help you avoid verification issues, Google penalties, and ranking problems that can prevent you from experiencing all of the benefits Google My Business has to offer.

1. Make sure you complete every step of the process as thoroughly and as completely as possible. Fill out as much information about your business as possible. There a lot of "fake businesses" out there who attempt to set up profiles for nefarious purposes. Google wants to make sure you aren't one of them. If you provide more information you'll give Google more reason to believe your profile is trustworthy, which means you can expect to experience an increase in your rankings.

2. Use your legal business name—not a nickname. Using a nickname or an abbreviated version of your name slows down the verification process, reduces your trustworthiness in Google's eyes, and creates a listing which contradicts listings in other directories—which are important. In a moment, I'll explain exactly why this is so important (see Tip #7).

3. Use your physical, business address precisely as the US Postal Service uses it, right down to spelling out the word "Street" if that is what the postal service does. Again, see Tip #7 to find out why.

4. Use a local phone number—not a 1-800 number. You want to strengthen Google's perception of your business as being a good fit for *location based*

search results. That means you want to show Google an area code that fits the location you're trying to rank for. 800 numbers are also far less trustworthy than traditional local numbers.

5. Add your hours of operation. Again, Google wants to see more information. So do customers. Besides, when you do this you get a perk. Customers who click on your business listing during your hours of operation will see a cheerful, "Open now!" right under your business hours. This may inspire them to take the next step, which is, of course, getting into their car, showing up at your doorstep, and spending some money.

6. Create a detailed overview of your business. Keep in mind that Google does not want to see slogans, URLs, store codes or phone numbers in this section. You need to avoid exaggerated claims like: "The best hair salon in town!" You can, however, give more details about your location: "A full service hair salon in Brooklyn's Williamsburg District" would be just fine.

7. Get NAP (name, address, phone number) citations to improve your rank. You receive a *citation* when anyone lists your name, address, and phone number somewhere on the Internet. You'll usually see citations in a directory of some kind, but they don't have to be. Placing your NAP in the footer of all of your web pages counts, too. Here's the catch: the NAP has to match the address in Google My Business in order to count. And it has to be an *exact match*. That's why you're safest using your legal name, and it's why you should take the time to look up the US Postal Service's version of your address. That's the address that Google is going to treat as trustworthy.

You probably have some citations already thanks to data aggregators. However, you do not have to *rely* on those services, and, indeed, you shouldn't. You'll miss vital opportunities if you wait for others to list you—and there's no guarantee that others will list your business in an accurate, helpful way.

You should actively make citation-building a priority. You can start by targeting the "usual suspects," which are:

- Yelp
- Yellowpages.com
- Citysearch.com
- Facebook.com
- Manta.com
- Merchantcircle.com
- Superpages.com
- Switchboard.com

The [Whitespark Local Citation Finder](#) is one of the easiest and best tools that you can use in order to update, claim, verify, and add citations across the Internet. You can use it to check and claim existing citations, and you can use it to create new ones. It's incredibly comprehensive. It also allows you to check out your competition, giving you an opportunity to build more citations.

It is a paid tool, but it's not an expensive paid tool. It's also the tool that the pros use to make sure they're hitting every citation opportunity.

Citation building can be tedious. Every site has its own rules and its own verification processes. You'll have to make an account on each site. However, it's also an easy way to market your business. Most web searchers click on the top local search result first. As a result, most of those web searchers end up doing business with that business. Therefore, being first is going to pay off in a big way, so your goal should be to get there (or very close to it at the least).

8. Kill duplicates. You'll want to find any duplicate Google My Business Pages and get rid of them. You'll also want to kill duplicates in every other directory you find as well.

9. Encourage your customers to leave reviews on your listing. Reviews are the other major ranking factor that Google My Business uses to rank your listing. Just make sure you're not offering customers incentives to do so, like discounts or free product. Usually, simply asking or reminding them is enough.

10. Use the photos and virtual tours features whenever possible. With visual content like this, consumers will be able to get a better idea of the atmosphere of your business. Plus, Google is more likely to display visual content next to your business listing in the search results. This is great, because visual content is so much more engaging and eye-catching than text alone.

Conclusion

Keeping up with all of Google's changes can be confusing, even for professionals who eat, breathe, and sleep Google every single day. It can be downright frustrating for business owners who also have other products or services to worry about.

Don't feel bad if you are one of the many business owners who just doesn't have the time, energy, or interest to keep up with Google My Business (or whatever Google comes up with next).

It's a vital marketing tool, but you've got other options—you can contact me at 07880 – 540201 if you need any help setting up or managing your Google My Business profile. I'll be more than happy to work with you, and to help you gather up more leads and more sales through the power of local search marketing.

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