

**SMALL
& LOCAL
BUSINESS**

THE ESSENTIAL GOOGLE MY BUSINESS GUIDE



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The Essential Google My Business Guide for Small and Local Business

Knowing that Google is Master of the Universe when it comes to search engine use and new customers finding your business, it is vital to understand how important your Google My Business listings are to ranking higher in Google search results.

Claiming and verifying your Google My Business listing for each location is the first and most basic step to local search engine optimization (SEO).

Claiming and verifying a separate Google My Business listing for each location of your business is the first and most basic step to local search engine optimization (SEO).

This is an easy way to ensure your business is visible and ranking in local search engine results.

Google likes to keep things in-house as much as possible, so it favors its own accurate and current business listings when giving local search results to search users.

Complete and accurate Google My Business listings that keep their information up to date and get business reviews on their listings are rewarded with higher rankings.

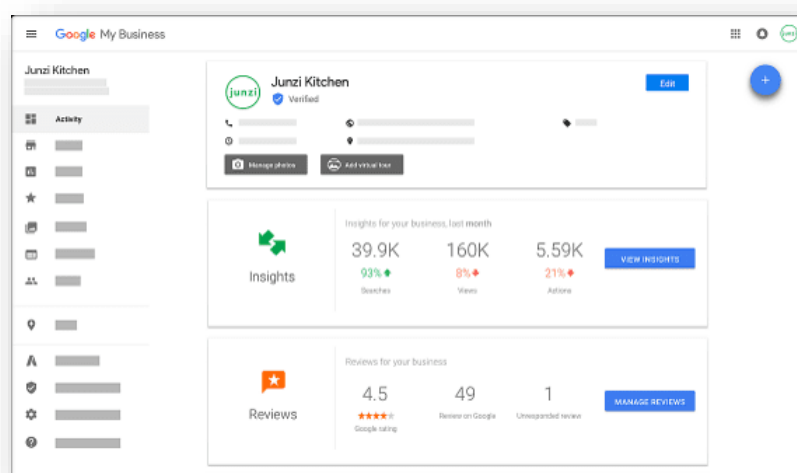


#1 Ensure Business Name, Address and Phone (NAP) is Correct on All Listings

Google wants your name on Google My Business to reflect your business' real-world name as it is used on your storefront and is known by your customers.

Take note that they do not permit you to add extra information to your name in this field such as location (*Great Smiles Dentistry – North Dallas*), taglines, special characters or URLs. Additionally, you can't use P.O. Boxes for your address and you should use your local phone number for each location as opposed to a call center toll-free number.

Remember that it is critical that your NAP not only be correct on Google My Business but consistent across the Web, so make sure you are monitoring and managing your business listings.





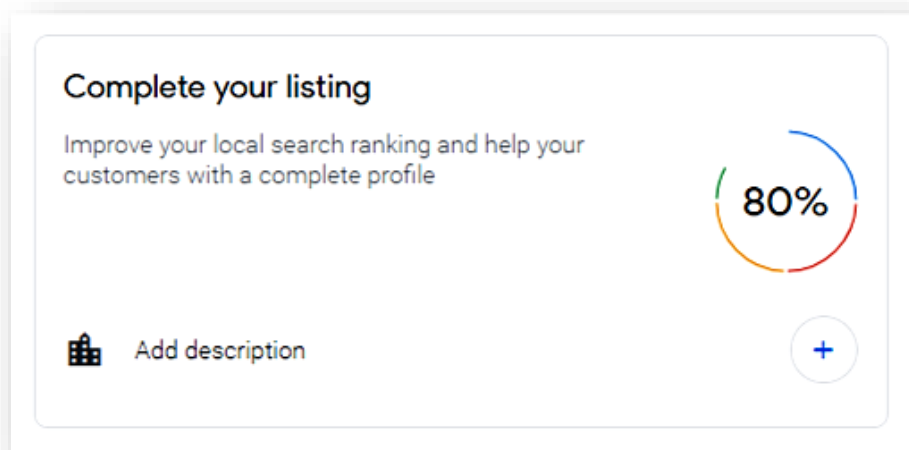
#2 Google My Business Descriptions ARE BACK on GMB Listings!

Google My Business had descriptions used to be attached to your required Google+ account and then all the sudden they were gone, and your Google My Business listings didn't have descriptions anymore. Well... they are back!

How to Optimize Google My Business Descriptions

With the return of Google My Business descriptions, submit content describing what separates you from the competition.

Links are not allowed, but Google My Business gives you 750 characters to get your message across and optimize your Google My Business listings.



- Add what makes your business unique in an overcrowded market.
- Get your keywords in there, but don't overstuff!
- Describe your products and services, especially when it isn't clear exactly what you do from your business name.
- Talk up local ties to your area to entice nearby customers.

Guidelines for Google My Business Descriptions

Published content should highlight what makes your business unique. You can use this field to provide useful information on services and products offered, as well as the mission and history of your business.

You should be upfront and honest about the information provided, focusing on content that is relevant and useful to your customers to understand your business.

Content published in this field should NOT:

- Be misleading to users. Do not provide inaccurate or false information about your business or the services and products offered.
- Display low-quality, irrelevant, or distracting content. For example, misspellings, gimmicky character use, gibberish, etc.
- Focus on special promotions, prices, and offer sale. Examples of content not allowed include, "Everything on sale, -50%" and "Best bagels in town for \$5!"
- Display links. No links of any type are allowed.
- Display offensive or inappropriate content.



#3 Get More and More Reviews to Your Google My Business Listings


Encourage customer to review your business by clicking “Write a Review” on your Google My Business page. The facts are clear: The more reviews on your Google business page and the better the rating of those reviews, the higher you are going to rank in local search results.

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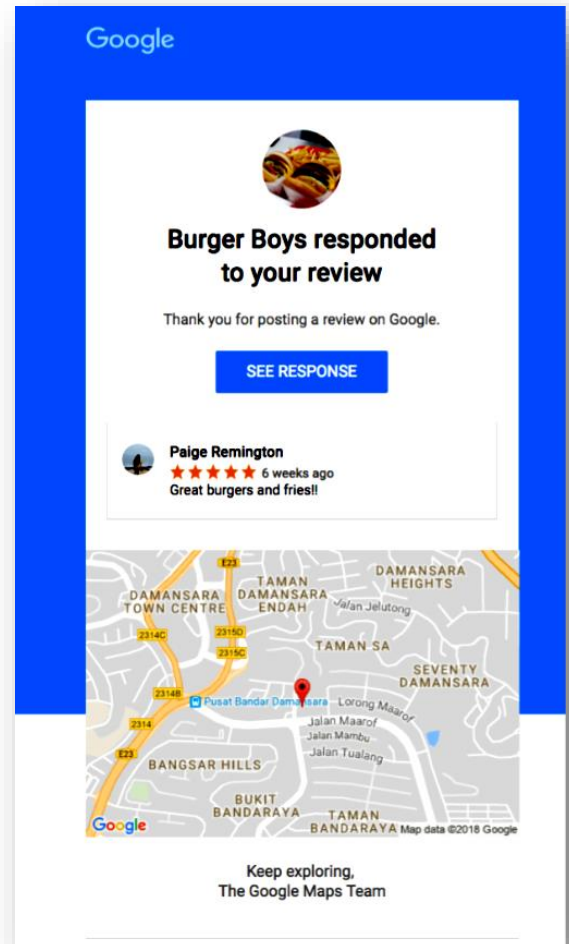
Review Management is a real thing, it is vital to the success of your business, and you need to be doing it yesterday. Have a plan and process in place to ask customers for reviews and make it easy for them to post the best of your reviews on Google.

On May 11, 2018, Google announced that they are sending email notifications to consumers [when a business has posted a response to a review](#) the consumer left, encouraging them to view the review response.

Not only does this up the expectations of consumers to hear back from businesses they have reviewed as word spreads of these new review response notification. It also makes leaving reviews a more interactive experience, enriching the experience for people who put in the time to leave reviews.

Review responses will be immediately visible on Google Search and Maps, and the reviewer will be emailed a notification like this one 

Schedule time to be an active presence on Google and respond appropriately to reviews to show future customers that high value you place on your customers' experiences with your business. You can only respond to reviews on "verified" Google My Business pages, so if you haven't done this yet, go now to [Verify a Local Business on Google](#).





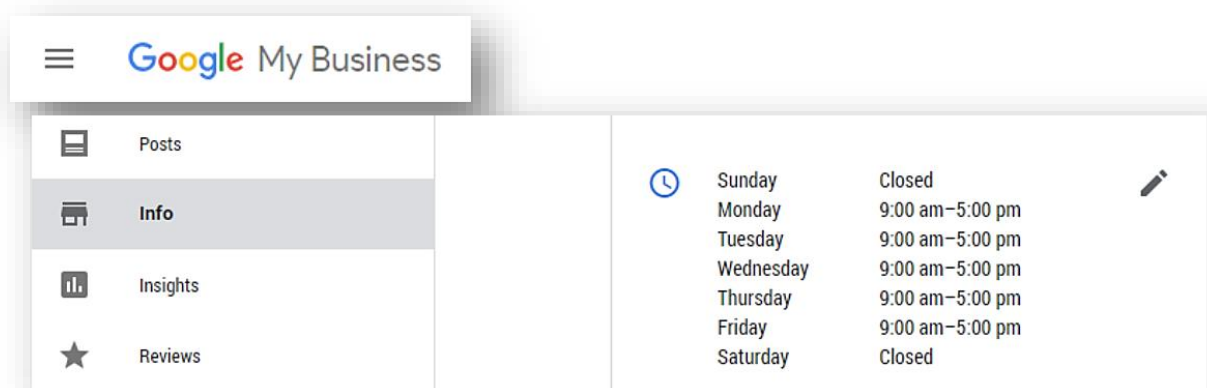
#4 Update Your Business Hours with Every Permanent, Holiday and Seasonal Change

Many businesses change their hours seasonally or year to year. Look at the hours on your listing and make sure they are up-to-date.

Navigating with Google Maps, and selecting a business that Google believes is closed or closing soon, you will be asked if you still want to go to this location even though it is closed or closing within the hour.

Don't lose customers because you have incorrect hours listed.


While you are at it, update your payment options if they have changed to avoid disappointing all of those Apple Pay© or Discover Card© paying customers.





#5 Pay Attention to Map Location and Where Your Local Pin is Positioned

You've verified your address is correct. Now take a look at your location on the map and make sure the marker is in the right place. If the marker placement doesn't make sense or it is on the wrong side of the road, you can drag the marker on that map to your exact business location.

While logged into your Google My Business Account, use the sidebar to find and click the "Info," and you'll see an option to view your listing on either Google Search or Google Maps. Click on the  button next to your address and you can move the location pin to the correct place.

Address

Providing an accurate business address is important so your business shows up in the right place on Google.

Country / Region

United States

Street address

YOUR ADDRESS

add line

City

YOUR ADDRESS

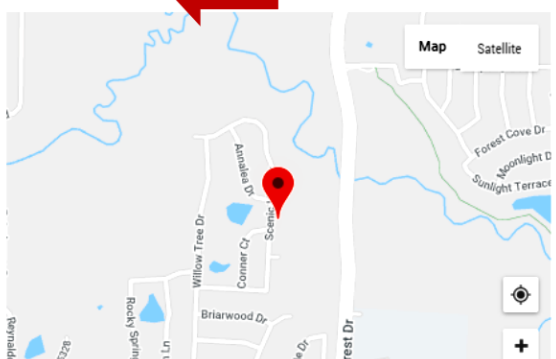
State

Texas

ZIP code

75071

Drag pin to reposition



Map

Satellite

CANCEL

APPLY

Please note: Edits may be reviewed for quality and can take up to 3 days to be published. [Learn more](#)



#6 Pick ALL the Best Google My Business Categories for Your Business

Categories on Google My Business is one of those instances where “more is more.” Select all the categories from their list that apply for your business, and don’t be afraid to get specific. “Sports Bar” is more relevant than “Bar” in search results.

This helps Google consider your business as a relevant result for local searches in that category. Don’t over-reach or misrepresent your business. Google is sure to notice and won’t be happy. But choose all the categories that represent the services or products your business provides.

You can find a complete listing of Google My Business categories by clicking this link and selecting the “en” (for English) tab at the bottom of the spreadsheet: [Google My Business Locations Categories](#)

The screenshot shows the Google My Business category selection interface. At the top, it says "Category" and "Categories describe what your business is, not what it does or sells." Below this, there is a section for "Primary category" with the text "Business to Business Service" entered. Underneath, there is a section for "Additional categories" with a text input field and a close button (X). A blue link "ADD ANOTHER CATEGORY" is positioned below the input field. At the bottom right, there are two buttons: "CANCEL" and "APPLY". A "Please note" section at the very bottom states: "Edits may be reviewed for quality and can take up to 3 days to be published. [Learn more](#)".

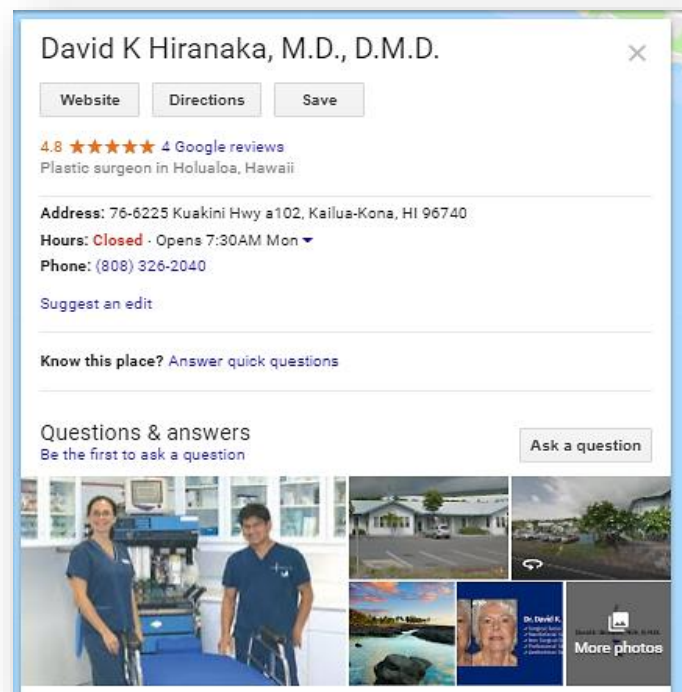


#7 Optimizing Individual Practitioners Listings

You know who you are:

- Doctors
- Dentists
- Lawyers
- Financial Planners
- Real Estate Agents
- Insurance Agents

If you are a public facing professional, with your own customer base, your name is your business name for Google My Business.



If you work with clients and customers and they can directly contact you at the verified location during business hours then that is good enough for Google.

For these types of individual practitioners, Google wants you to create your own page, where you can include title and degree designations such as Dr., MD, JD, CFA, or Esq.



#8 Add Photos, Photos, and More Photos

Adding quality, story-telling photos to your Google My Business listings can go a long way in selling your business, but no photo is speaking volumes as well.

Multiple surveys have shown that photos, reviews, and opening hours all have a substantial, positive relationship with consumer engagement.

Showing photos of your business location (interior and exterior) not only help customers find your business, it helps build the trust customers need to overcome the fear of the unknown and try a new business.


Add photos or videos

After you select the photos or videos you want to add to your Google My Business listing, make sure photos are in either JPG or PNG format and the [right size](#), and videos follow our [guidelines](#). Then, follow the steps below to upload them to your listing:

Computer

1. Sign in to [Google My Business](#). If you have multiple locations, open the location you'd like to manage.
2. From the menu, click Photos.
3. Choose the [type of photo](#) or video you'd like to add.
4. Upload the photo or video from your computer, or choose one you've already uploaded.

Mobile

1. Open the [Google My Business mobile app](#).
2. Tap Menu , then tap Photos.
3. Choose the [type of photo](#) or video you'd like to add.
4. Choose a photo or video from your camera roll, or take a new one.

With photos, customer reviews, and accurate location and contact information consumers are more likely to take a chance on your business.

Here are the basic photo guidelines for Google My Business:

- Photos must be in one of these formats: JPG, GIF, PNG, TIFF, BMP.
- Each photo must be smaller than 5MB.
- We recommend adding photos that are larger than 720 x 720 pixels and smaller than 3000 x 3000 pixels.
- The longer dimension of the photo should be no more than twice the shorter dimension. Landscape photos look better than portrait photos on Google products.
- Each location can have no more than 25 additional photos.
- The photo should be in focus, well-lit, have no photoshop alterations, and no excessive use of filters. The image should represent reality.

If your photos don't fit these standards, we may not be able to display them on Google products.

Types of Photos on Google My Business

There are several types of photos you can add to your business listing:

- **Profile photo:** Help your customers recognize your business.
- **Cover photo:** Showcase your page's personality. Adding a cover photo automatically sets it as your listing's preferred photo. This action doesn't guarantee it populates as the first image for your business, but it does tell Google that you prefer to display this photo.

- **Additional photos:** Add different photos to spotlight features of your business that customers consider when making purchasing decisions. Learn more about [business photos](#).

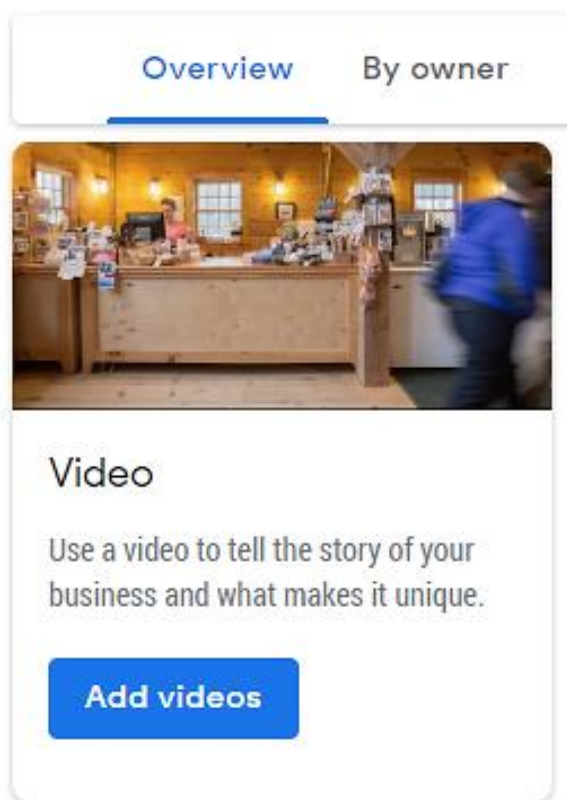
Types of business-specific photos

	Description	Minimum number to add	Tips
Exterior photos	Exterior photos help customers recognize your business as they approach from different directions.	Add at least three great exterior photos to help customers recognize your business.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capture a photo from each direction that customers might approach your business. 2. Try uploading photos that show your business at different times of day.
Interior photos	Interior photos help your customers get a feel for the ambiance and decor of your business.	Add at least three great interior photos to show customers what your business feels like inside.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capture photos that truthfully show what it's like to stand inside your business as a customer. 2. Capture the atmosphere of your business in your photos.
Product photos	Great photos of representative or popular products give customers a better understanding of the kinds of goods you offer.	Add at least three photos of products that you sell.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Showcase the items that are most popular for your business. 2. Try taking evenly lit photos of your products.
Photos at work	Photos help customers quickly understand the type of work you do.	Add at least three photos that are representative of the services you offer.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capture photos of your team providing different types of service to customers. 2. Capture photos of the speciality services you deliver.
Food & drink photos	Food & drink photos add color and detail to your menu and help customers plan where to eat.	Add at least three photos of the food or drinks you serve.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Showcase the food items that are most popular for your business. 2. Try taking evenly lit photos of your food items.



#9 Google My Business Now Includes Videos with Photos in Search Results

Now you can post videos to your Google My Business listings in addition to photos to give search users a richer view of your business. Videos can be up to 30 seconds long, and it's worth noting that videos can be added by owners AND customers.



Adding video is as easy as adding photos. Log into your Google My Business account and go to the photo section to upload the latest photos and video. While you're in there, select the best "Cover," "Profile" and "Logo" images for your profile.

Videos uploaded by you will appear under the "By owner" tab and customer uploaded videos will appear under the "By customer" tab. All videos will appear under the "Video" tab where you can delete any videos. For search and map users, videos will show up the

same as photos. If you have two or more videos, you could have a video subtab show up on mobile searches.

Optimizing Google My Business Videos

Creating a video for your locations is neither complicated nor expensive and doesn't require extra equipment or video editing software. Start out simple taking videos of your location's interior, exterior, employees working, and customers enjoying your products and services.

All you need is a smartphone to take and share or save videos. These Google My Business videos are not and cannot be commercials or advertising and must be taken by users at your location. If video content isn't relevant to each specific location, Google will probably remove it.

Here are the Google My Business Format and Style Guidelines:

Basic Guidelines

- Video Max Duration: 30 seconds
- Video Max File size: 100 MB
- Video Min Resolution: 720p

Stylistic Adjustments

- Stylistic adjustments (such as applied filters) are acceptable, provided that these stylistic changes are minimal and are not appended elements such as borders, text, collaged images, etc.
- Content that makes it difficult for others to understand the environment you're sharing may be rejected.
- Screenshots, drawings, posters and other non-photos, other than videos, should not be uploaded.
- For videos, only upload content that is stable and has good visual quality. Content that is out of focus, shaky, or has bad exposure should not be uploaded. Distorted or corrupted videos are not allowed.

Superimposed Text or Graphics on Videos

Superimposed text or graphics, including promotional content such as logos, are subject to the following requirements:

- For 360 photos, superimposed content must be limited to either the zenith or nadir (top or bottom 25% of the equirectangular image) but cannot be present in both.
- For traditional digital photos and videos, superimposed content cannot take up more than 10% of the image or video and must be limited to a single edge.



#10 Use Google Posts to Promote Your Events, Sales, and Products

Google Posts were introduced to share fresh content with people who found your business through Google Search. This Google My Business feature lets you **create posts with content you want to be displayed to customers when they see your business listing on Google search results**. Publish your events, products, and services directly to Google Search in the Knowledge Panel and Maps.

They are meant to be used to show search user what is going on with your business right now.

Each post you create is removed from search results after seven days, or after the event date. Enhance the search and comparison parts of the buyer's journey with these quick and simple updates.

Google Posts give you the opportunity to promote your latest and greatest content, deals, events, product updates, and service specials appear with your listing in search.

NEW to Google My Business: You can now create OFFER POST to feature exclusive offers and limited-time deals and discounts.

What's new

CREATE AN OFFER POST

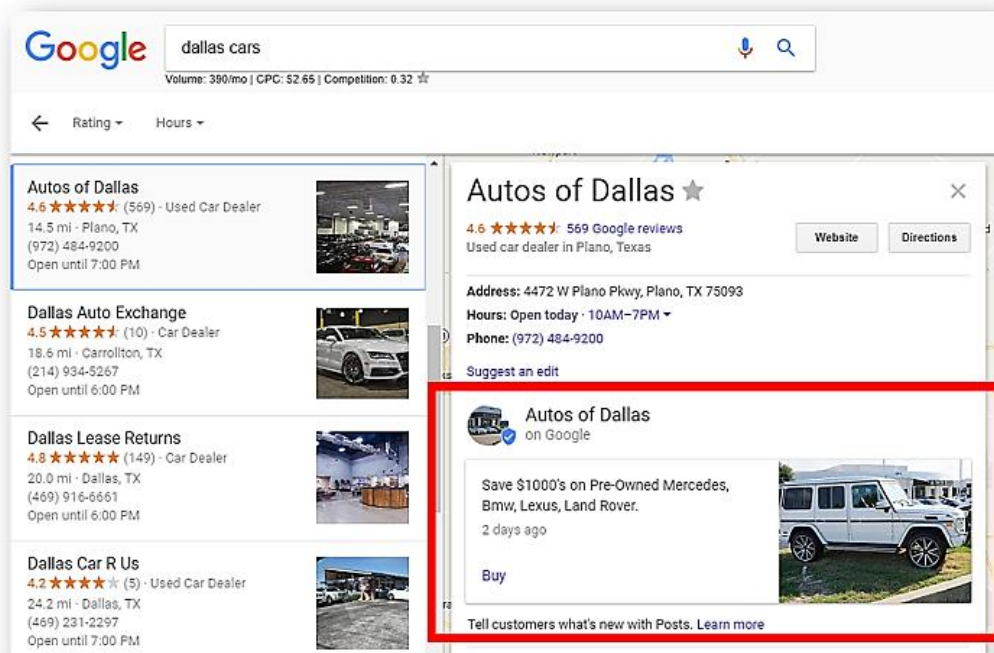
1. Feature a special offer
Attract customers with a limited-time deal or discount.
2. Set dates
Make it clear when the promotion starts and ends.
3. Make it easy to redeem
Add a coupon code, terms and conditions, and link to redeem the offer.

Try it now

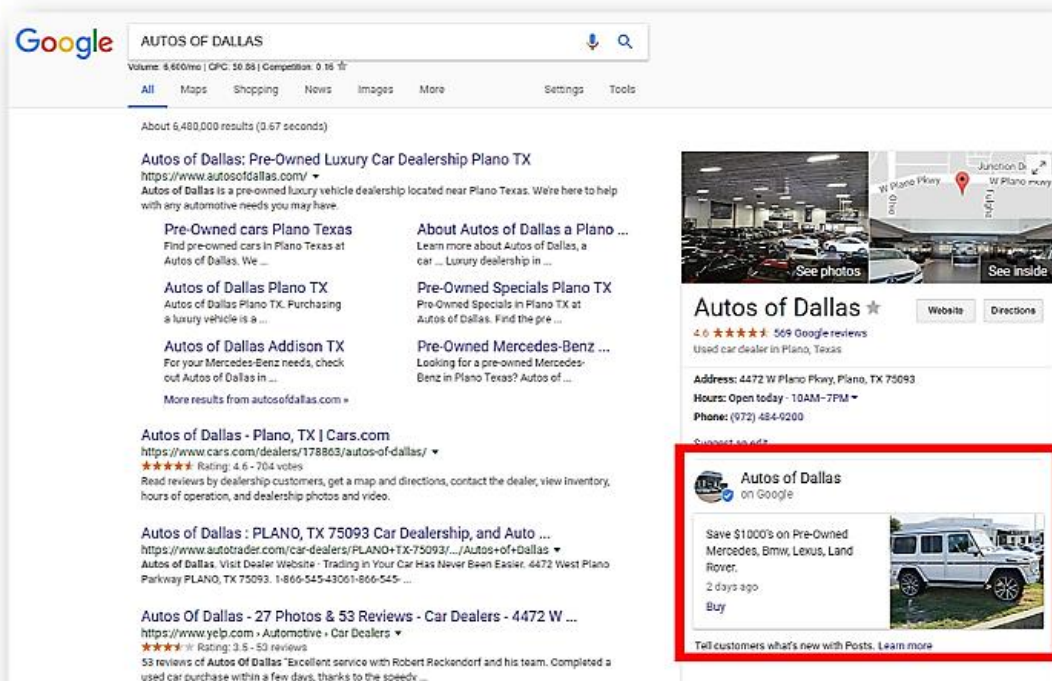
How a Google Post Shows on Search and Maps

Google Posts are part of your Google My Business account and only show as part of your business listing as it appears in search results. If a Google Search user is looking for “best carpet cleaners in Boston” they are not going to see your posts in search results.

For a service or product, your local SEO and Google My Business optimization will need to have your business ranking high in the local pack and maps where your business can be clicked, and then they will see your Google Post.



If Google users search for AAA Carpets and Floors, and that's your Google My Business verified and optimized business account, then the Knowledge Panel for your business will display to the right of search results where customers will see your Google Posts.



Optimizing Google Post to Promote Your Business

Character Limits: Only the first 80-100 characters will show in the Post so make those characters count and preview the Post to make sure your sentence isn't cut off.

Headlines: Write headlines that make the reader want to click. Think of it as an ad to inspire action.

Call to Action: Tell the viewer what to do next. "Free Download" or "Learn How to" or "Order Now" are clear CAT's that minimize the decisions the audience needs to make.

Image Size: The best image size is 750 x 750. Anything smaller than 250 x 250 won't be accepted. Preview the post to make sure the image appears as intended.

Post Often: Share daily specials and current promotions to keep customers up-to-date on your offers.

Multiple Post: If you have more than one post, the newest one will display first and older post show in a carousel format. Users can scroll through up to 10 posts, but only the first two can be fully seen without scrolling.

Do's and Don'ts for Writing a Google Post directly from Google

There is a right and wrong way to leverage Google Post. To get the do's and don'ts we went directly to the source. This is what Google tells us about Google Post:

When customers find your business on Google, they can see offers, news, and events from your business posts that show on Google Search and Maps. You can use posts to tell customers about:

- **Events** such as a jazz brunch or an in-store session
- **Offers/specials** such as sales and discounts
- **Product updates** such as new merchandise
- **Announcements** such as "Open late this Saturday" or "Special guests this week!"

A post to your customers on Google should be brief, useful, and inspire action, and photos should be well-lit and in-focus. Here's a sample post that's effective:

Joanie's Bistro



Mother's Day special brunch package

Spoil your mom with our unique gift: a special prix fixe, \$20 brunch menu – including our famous pecan French toast – and a custom floral arrangement from Soffian Florist. Book now as space is limited!

Google's Suggestions for Writing the Perfect Google Post

1. **Be precise:** What are the 3 things your customer needs to know? What do you want them to remember, for how much, and when?
"Happy Hour! Half-price milkshakes from 5-6 PM every Friday."
2. **Be personal:** Show what your business values:
"We love families at Mike's and to show our appreciation, kids eat free this weekend!"
3. **Tell your customers what they can do.** Are you selling a product? Tell them how they can buy.
"Tickets range from \$60-\$160 and are available for purchase at the front desk starting at 12 PM EST today."
4. **Highlight what makes your business, product, or offer unique.** Large selection, free shipping? Tell people: *"Free shipping on orders over \$50."*
5. **Be timely** — use a key selling point or popular item as the hook for your post: *"Spring is here. All flip-flops now 30% off."*
6. **Be sure to include any redemption instructions, unique codes, or restrictions** on offers or sales:
"\$10 off purchase of \$50 or more. 50% off select women's clothing."
7. **Use abbreviations** for days and months, and don't use periods, to allow more space for your post, and abbreviate hours:
Jan, Feb, Mar... Mon, Tue, Wed... 9 AM, 5 PM, 12 PM
8. **Avoid the commercial slang and excessive exclamation marks or all caps** that make your post look like an advertisement:
"BOGO: 50% off men's sneakers." "Crazy SALE today!!!"
9. **Don't include more than one offer or too many exclusions** in one communication: NO ► *"Half price coffee and tea from 3-6 PM on Fridays, and buy 6, get one free donut on weekdays."*



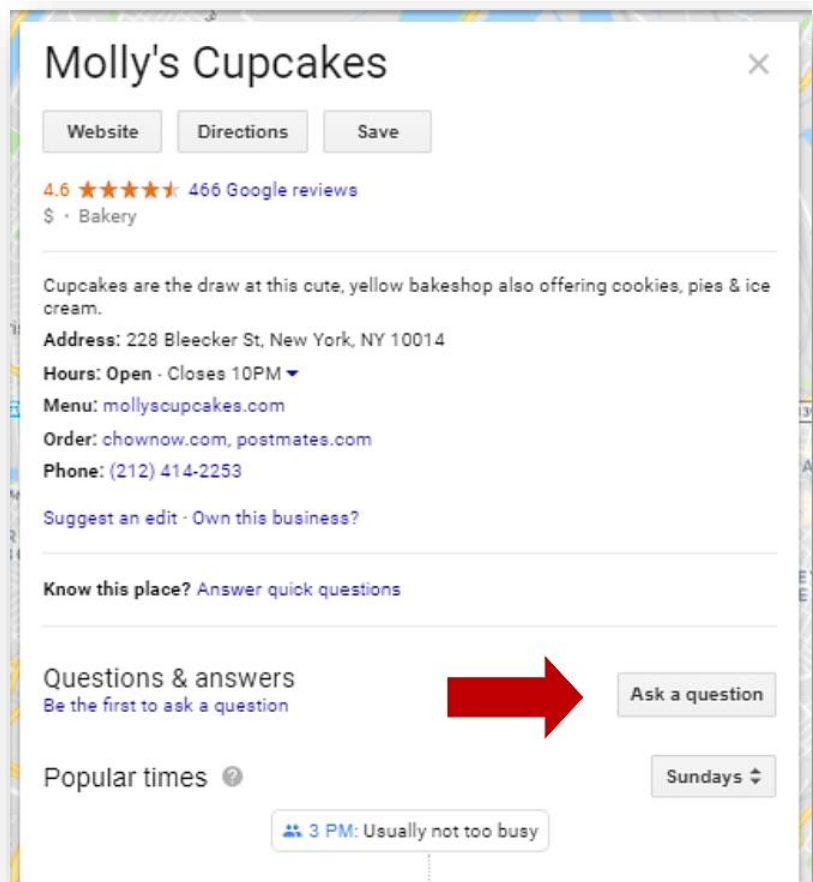
#11 Google My Business Q & A

Google Questions & Answers (Q&A) allows local business owners and the public to answer consumer questions asked by search engine users.

Google's Questions & Answers feature can be helpful in keeping your customers informed, but just like review monitoring this feature can't be ignored and will require a little maintenance on your end to protect your reputation.

The good news is that most local businesses are not yet using this feature. By being proactive and taking the time to optimize your Questions & Answers, you'll be ahead of the competition.

Ask and answer questions from your listing in search results.



Google Questions & Answers Pros and Cons

Pros:

You as the business owner and other people can ask and answer questions giving Google Maps and Google Search users more customer-relevant information about your business. Here is another level of customer-centric data available to future customers through an easy to use FAQ format you can contribute to.

The screenshot shows the Google Maps interface for 'City Cakes'. The business has a 4.7-star rating from 119 reviews. Below the rating, there's a description: 'Bakery offers custom & basic cakes, cupcakes & cookies for all occasions, plus cake design classes.' The address is 'Lower Level, 251 W 18th St, New York, NY 10011'. The hours are 'Open - Closes 9PM'. The menu is 'citycakes.com'. The order links are 'grubhub.com, chownow.com, postmates.com, seamless.com'. The phone number is '(646) 688-2286'. There's a 'Suggest an edit' link. Below this is the 'Questions & answers' section. A question is asked: 'Is it possible to deliver out of state?'. The answer is from 'City Cakes (Owner)' 5 months ago. The answer text is: 'Hi Kitty! Thanks for reaching out! For cakes, we can deliver within driving distance and it's charged by the hour - so depending on where or what you need, sometimes it's not a bad option :) Outside of driving distance, the only thing we currently deliver are our amazing Half Pound Cookies, available for ordering in 4 or 8 packs on our website. Hope this information helps!'. A red arrow points to the 'City Cakes (Owner)' name in the answer.

City Cakes

Website Directions Save

4.7 ★★★★★ 119 Google reviews
Cake Shop

Bakery offers custom & basic cakes, cupcakes & cookies for all occasions, plus cake design classes.

Address: Lower Level, 251 W 18th St, New York, NY 10011

Hours: Open - Closes 9PM ▾

Menu: citycakes.com

Order: grubhub.com, chownow.com, postmates.com, seamless.com

Phone: (646) 688-2286

[Suggest an edit](#)

Know this place? [Answer quick questions](#)

Questions & answers [Ask a question](#)

Q: Is it possible to deliver out of state?

A: Hi Kitty! Thanks for reaching out! For cakes, we can deliver within driving distance and it's charged by the hour - so depending on where or what you need, sometimes it's not a bad option :) Outside of driving distance, the only thing we currently deliver are our amazing Half Pound Cookies, available for ordering in 4 or 8 packs on our website. Hope this information helps!

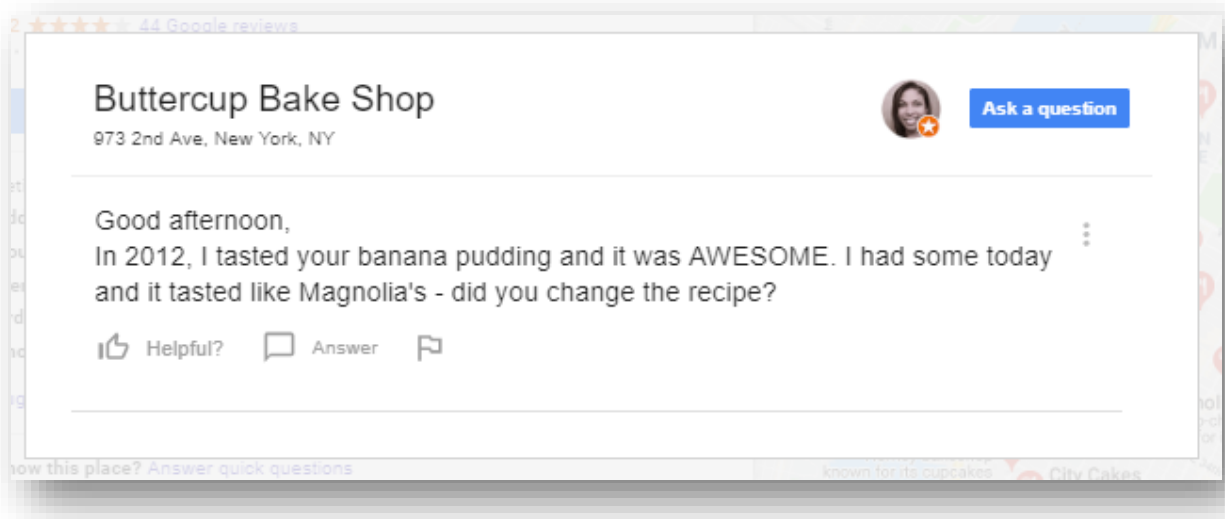
City Cakes (Owner) 5 months ago

Cons:

You can't opt out of or turn off the Question & Answer feature. Users can leave answers/comments without the restrictions of review, approval or monitoring. This unfiltered instant publishing leaves room for user-generated content that could be harmful to your reputation to appear with your Google business listing. This could be bad news at a time when reputation management is vital to the success of local and small businesses.



If you aren't answering questions, there's a chance Google Search and Maps users will do it for you. Or the questions being asked will just sit there unanswered which is a lost opportunity to highlight what's special about your business for free.



5 Steps to Optimizing Google Questions & Answers

User-generated content on Google such as reviews and Questions & Answers have the potential to impact your online reputation. Business owners and reputation/marketing managers should monitor this feature as part of a plan for monitoring reviews.

Some business such as entertainment locations, restaurants and hotels will see more traffic in their Q&A section, but all businesses should take the opportunity to populate this feature, providing answers to the questions that customers frequently ask.

Optimizing Google's Questions & Answers

1. Be proactive and start using this feature now.
2. Be helpful and concise when answering questions.
3. Install Google Maps app to get new question notifications.
4. Answer all questions promptly to protect reputation.
5. Report false or malicious answers to Google.

1. BE PROACTIVE AND START NOW.

Stay ahead of the competition and on top of anyone who's visited your location and been asked by Google to answer a question. Come up with a list of questions that answer the issues your customers are asking and answer them populate this section. Think about the actual questions customers call and ask before visiting your location.

2. BE HELPFUL AND CONCISE.

Answer questions with only the needed information to be helpful. Note that you shouldn't answer just yes or no to a question because the question asker can edit their question and then your "yes" might not make sense anymore. If they ask if you take Sunday appoints, then a good answer is "Yes, we do work on Sundays but only by appointment with limited services."

3. INSTALL THE GOOGLE MAPS APP ON YOUR PHONE.

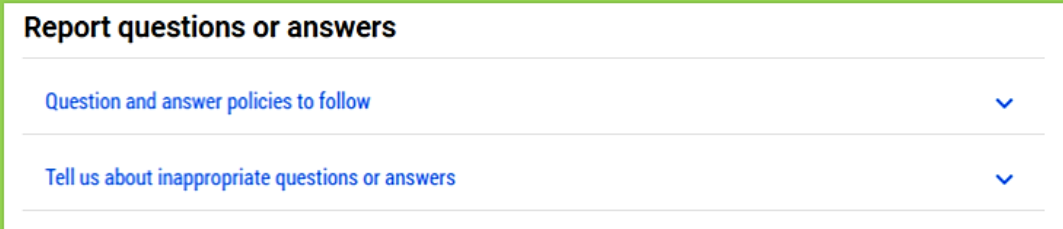
Log into Google Maps with the account you use to manage Google My Business, and make sure that notifications are turned on. Stay on top of your Q&A section with push notifications you'll receive when you are logged in. Currently, there is no Google My Business dashboard section to monitor the Q&A feature.

4. ANSWER CUSTOMER QUESTIONS PROMPTLY.

Make sure you are checking in at least weekly on this section and answering any questions as soon as they pop up. If left unanswered or ignored for any period of time you risk having random previous customers (or competitors) answer the questions for you.

5. REPORT FALSE OR MALICIOUS ANSWERS.

You can't hide spam or malicious postings, but you can [report fake content to Google](#). I've seen where past customers have used this feature as yet another platform to complain about a negative experience, completely irrelevant to the "Does this place have restrooms?" question they posted under. If the comment shouldn't be there, let Google know.



The image shows a screenshot of a web form titled "Report questions or answers". The form has a white background with a thin green border. It contains two main sections, each with a blue link and a downward-pointing chevron icon. The first section is "Question and answer policies to follow" and the second is "Tell us about inappropriate questions or answers".

Report questions or answers	
Question and answer policies to follow	▼
Tell us about inappropriate questions or answers	▼

Optimize Google My Business Listings to Amplify Google Search Rankings and Traffic

By optimizing your Google My Business listing you can expect higher ranking in local search, an increased click-through-rate to your business website, and a better search (and find) experience for the user.

A search user, looking to do business now is likely to become your next customer if you can optimize your Google presence to show at the top of search engine and maps results pages.

Have a Wordpress website? Add Google Social Proof to your website today with the Trust Social Wordpress plugin.

Click the image below to learn more and see it in action

