



THE FUTURE OF LOCAL MARKETING IS NOW.

5 WAYS LOCAL MARKETING
WILL IMPACT THE WAY YOU
DO BUSINESS THIS YEAR



sweet **IQ**
by REACHLOCAL



The best companies aren't waiting for the future to come to them—they're there now.

If you manage marketing or search for a multi-location brand, you already know the game-changing potential of local search. But just when you think you've got everything figured out, the rules change.

The local marketing industry has been over-focused on listings management, and today it's primed for a rapid evolution. This means businesses have to start going beyond just building citations and getting listed - 2017's local search will be about generating ROI from your efforts by getting more customers to your locations.



Location Management is so 2013.

The basics of local search will always be important. But many companies are stuck on listings management alone without seeing the bigger picture on how local marketing, when well executed, is a revenue generator.

With nearly all consumers (97%) using online media to shop locally¹ and 76% of smartphone users visiting a store within 24 hours² after conducting a search, if your company is treating local as a 'set it and forget it' commodity, you are doing it wrong.

Active listings management paired with an optimized website with fast loading content your customers want, will always be essential. And by essential, we mean the absolute bare minimum.



Going beyond listings.

Accurate and optimized listings allow multi-location businesses to:

- Launch local campaigns that align with social networks
- Implement trackers that allow better identification of online-to-offline conversions.
- Create vital touchpoints to interact with customers along their buying journey.
- Establish a more organic online presence that allows brands to be where they need to be and not just everywhere.

With this in mind, let's explore how new trends will affect the way you approach local marketing for your business.

Chapter One

Social Media and crowd-sourced local content.

Social Media platforms are increasingly integrating geolocation into their interfaces. What this means is that users can now geotag their content, check into locations and even walk inadvertently into a brand's geo-fence. Each of these local interactions are part of a bigger picture where consumers are using their current location as a statement for what psychologists call Social Proof.

Social proof, also known as informational social influence, is a psychological phenomenon where people assume the actions of others in an attempt to reflect correct behavior for a given situation.³

The key takeaway for marketers is how the Social Proof effect makes consumers emulate what they see as a validated behavior. By seeing others consuming a product, such as taking a selfie with a branded message or broadcasting a live video from a certain location, we assume that the people around us possess more knowledge about a given situation. In this case, a product, a place or an activity.

A classic example⁴ of this are the recorded laughs at comedy shows. The recording gives people cues for the right moments to laugh, when -or especially if - the joke isn't that funny. With Social Media, it's not just anyone behaving a certain way. It's their friends and family, so the validation is even more powerful.





How is this relevant for Local Marketers?

Social Proof is what has made social media so powerful.⁵ It gives us social reference and peer validation. And who doesn't want to be validated? Translating this into how a brand interacts with its audience is key to understanding why user generated content (or UGC) is essential to social success.

Shoppers who interact with UGC are 97 percent more likely to convert with a retailer than customers who do not.⁶

The rise of Snapchat Geofilters for brands has made the impact of UGC even more evident - pointing to further integration of social media and local marketing. This type of content generates critical and influential natural responses such as reviews and ratings⁷ which are an essential complement to local listings, and it can sway consumer decisions to buy certain services or products.

With Snapchat, brands are developing creative advertising opportunities through user-generated content, and we expect to see more opportunities for consumer-focused, personalized marketing via highly localized content on other social media platforms. Snapchat and its Geofilters will influence Facebook*, Instagram, and perhaps even Twitter to catch up to its innovative opportunities for local marketers.

*As this piece was being written, Facebook launched "facebook Stories" with filters for live feeds just like in Snapchat. Another opportunity for marketers to tap into UGC. <https://techcrunch.com/2017/01/25/facebook-stories/>

5 tips to stay ahead of the local-social trend:

- 1 EMBRACE NEW FEATURES ON KEY PLATFORMS and have a strategy in place before you go live. The primary challenge for brands who use platforms like Snapchat and Instagram is to communicate with the audience using their language. Being in the position of “the advertiser” is no longer an option. Brands have to behave and interact as real persons with its followers. This will ensure increased engagement and peer validation (following the Social Proof concept). Recognize UGC and praise its creators. Customers love to know their content is being watched, shared and validated.
- 2 USE UGC FOCUSED ON SECURING RATINGS AND REVIEWS to influence the discovery, exploration, and purchase phases of the customer life cycle. Feature those reviews and ratings prominently — even in-store, — so the social proof starts its snowball effect.
- 3 USE THE SCALE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO YOUR ADVANTAGE. UGC helps turn your customers into brand advocates while providing an opportunity for them to create an organic catalog of your products. Instant feedback from the brand and the community is a priceless validator for brands, without the perils of being too sales oriented or boring.
- 4 BUILD TRUST WITH YOUR COMMUNITY. Consumers huddle around UGC that seems relevant to them (first step to become brand ambassadors). There’s a tacit agreement of “non-interruption”. Honour that agreement. No one wants their feed invaded by an annoying ad that disrupts the finely threaded storylines and feeds. Don’t become a salesperson in social media, let your customers do that work for you.
- 5 CENTRALIZE YOUR LOCAL ECOSYSTEM USING THE RIGHT PLATFORM. Use the right network of directories and choose a platform that allows you to integrate strategies for Snapchat and combined them with paid advertising on AdWords. Centralization of all your directories and local campaigns is vital to see the big picture and strategize more tactically.

Chapter Two

Not all directories are made equal. Brands won't need to be listed everywhere.

It's as simple as this: if you are a car dealership, you certainly don't need to be listed on WebMD.

As obvious as that may seem, we've seen it happen. Moving forward, the practice of shotgunning listings to every possible directory will be obsolete as brands develop better strategies to target the best directories. Big players like Google⁸, Bing, Foursquare, Facebook, Yelp or Apple Maps, have algorithms that reach every corner of the internet in search for the most accurate information possible. After all, these engines are in the business of providing users with the most precise and exact information possible.

So what happens when your business is listed everywhere?

Initial common sense dictates that the more, the better. But duplicate listings — or those with out-of-date information, are sadly more common than most marketers care to admit — or even know about.

When searching for the most updated information, key directories run comparisons between the information they find online, on directories and other sources, including your own website. When the content doesn't match, or they find duplicates, the validity of the information becomes weakened and your online credibility becomes compromised. Seeing as listing accuracy is a critical element in strong online rankings, a compromised credibility will most likely result in a decrease in rankings, both organically and locally.



The cost of erroneous local data is high.

According to a study conducted by the Local Search Association, about \$10.3 billion worth of potential annual sales are lost⁹ because of wrong, missing, or incomplete local business information.

Businesses must partner with local marketing experts that will not only advise them on the best directories for their industry, but also how to optimize listing content to best convert online searches.

Your local marketing platform should alert you when duplicates are found and help you manage or suppress them. This will allow you to focus on initiatives like Local AdWord campaigns and Reputation Management that will not only attract more customers, but also grow and develop brand loyalty.



The Online-to-Offline attribution gap will near closing, thanks to Big Data.

The holy grail of Local Marketing? Linking a local search to a single purchase.

Proximity technology plays a key role here as it would allow businesses to collect foot-traffic data in their locations. But traffic data alone won't cut it, as an online-to-offline correlation still needs to be made by connecting that data with online searches.

The good news is that in-store technology is already taking centre stage. In fact, beacons have been at the core of many predictions before touting them as the way of the future for either proximity marketing or local marketing . The reality is that retailers seem weary to deploy them. At least for now.

THE REASON BEHIND THIS HESITATION is that while beacon technology has advanced to the point they could actually close the conversion gap, users are not ready to interact with them in a consistent way. There are a few reasons for this: Beacons require consumers' opt-in as they have raised privacy concerns, they also require users to have Bluetooth enabled at all times, and they can be perceived as invasive if they are used to bombard customers with promotional messages.



Coming to a store near you.

There is, however, a lot of optimism in the industry as beacons make their way to big retailers: According to an ABI Research, beacon shipments are expected to have a compound annual growth rate of 133% from 2016-2021, reaching its peak by 2020.¹⁰ This means 2017 might not be the year we will see accurate in-store conversion tracking happening, but we see big data playing a big role in filling up some gaps.

Thanks to the evolution of Big Data, we expect that 2017 will bring more intelligent O2O funnels, supported by consumer insights across key directories and sites.

Insights tell us where and when consumers are searching and now, knowing how they're converting, it helps brands determine the connection between the searchers and the shoppers.

Brands will have access to information on searcher's online behaviors by discovering new patterns and using tighter tracking methods to discern a single user's web clicks, geo-locations, and social media activity, to name a few. Local marketers can use this information to create highly targeted, trackable online-to-offline campaigns and solve the attribution equation.



How to use data to create your conversion funnel?

In one word: Singularity.

Gathering listing data like clicks-to-calls, clicks-to-address and busiest times is the first step to building campaigns that are unique to a location and to a singular action originating online:

IMPORTING OFFLINE CONVERSIONS THAT START WITH A PPC CLICK: Platforms like AdWords¹¹ have a full offline attribution capability that assigns a unique and singular “code” to each action, which you can pair with offline sales. The success of such campaigns depends on targeted ads based on the data coming from your local presence.

IMPLEMENTING CALL TRACKING: Call tracking solutions allow each caller to be assigned a singular phone number, so leads and sales can be attributed to site visitors who go to offline locations after having called for information. This tool should allow you to see page visits and keyword referrals, and works best when combined with PPC local campaigns where your listing is transformed into an ad. From mobiles, the click-to-call functionality in Google search is gaining popularity within mobile users and can be enabled in AdWords as a call extension.

TAG YOUR CUSTOMERS WITH A SINGULARITY: This will help you identify them along their buying journey. This is achieved with traceable tools like loyalty apps or cards, online coupons that are redeemable in-store and unique marketing messages that you can quickly trace back to an online action. The key here is to centralize all the data points, so you know exactly who did what, and when.

Chapter Four

Voice Search Campaigns Will Be On The Rise.

Siri, Cortana, Alexa and Google Now are here to stay. The rise of voice recognition devices that are able to process natural language and their quick adoption by users is changing the way we interact with our phones and computers.

According to an LSA study, 60% of people have begun using voice search within the last 12 months.¹²

That will contribute to a shift in how consumers are going to interact with local listings moving forward.

As natural language processors become more and more accurate, voice queries have various intents (and we forecast these will expand as accuracy becomes more human-like). They are divided in four categories:¹³

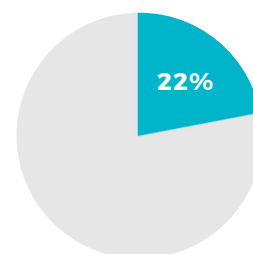
PERSONAL ASSISTANT: Used to build shopping lists, set up reminders and alarms, and dictation for emails, notes and text messages. (27%)

ENTERTAINMENT: Used to give commands to play music, search for videos, post on social media, search for sporting events, etc. (21%)

GENERAL QUERIES: These are searches for news, online content, banking and travel. (30%)

LOCAL SEARCH: Restaurants, addresses and directions, brick and mortar shopping, travel times, traffic, local events, etc. (22%)

That 22% is very interesting for Local Marketers but not necessarily the whole picture. That percentage relates only to users clearly looking for addresses, phone numbers or directions. The thing with Voice Search is that it is way more nuanced than a text field on a search engine.



PERCENTAGE OF LOCAL SEARCH INTENT AMONG VOICE QUERIES

Holding man-machine conversations.

According to the KPCB Internet Trends 2016 report, the accuracy rate of voice search is up to 92 percent, which takes those nuances to a new level of man-machine understanding.¹⁴ For example, a consumer might type on Google “Bose sound repair shops near me,” but a voice command might sound more like “there’s a weird static sound coming out of my Bose earphones.” Voice commands are meant to be more conversational (hence the race to perfect natural language recognition). The intent in the voice command is to solve the problem, which means there may be new and different steps for brands to consider before the answer is simply their location and phone number.

As searches evolve into the AI realm, marketers will have to transform their keywords into phrases and even seek integrations with services like Alexa or Siri. Companies like 1-800-Flowers for example have set integrations with Alexa, so instead of asking Alexa for “Flower Shops near me”, users can just say “Hey Alexa, send a dozen red roses to my girlfriend on Valentine’s Day.”¹⁵ Integrations like this will skip the local search and go straight for the sell and will be a great opportunity for marketers to keep a captive audience. For businesses without such a direct path to purchase, they key will lie in more targeted and specific content that answers a question before it answers a purchase-related need.

Transitioning Local SEO from keywords to keyphrases.

Marketers have the same challenge with Local SEO as they have with social media: They have to act, look, sound and listen like an actual person. The traditional keyword-infused brand “voice” will have to migrate to a conversational tone that embraces natural language. If you sell pizzas, the keywords “pizza,” “delivery” and “pepperoni pizza” won’t be enough anymore. Websites and listings will have to be optimized for voice recognition and natural language. Think more along the lines of “best pizzas in the Montreal area”, “best pepperoni pizza in town” or “best pizzas in Montreal”.

The optimization for voice goes even further. When a consumer runs a local search using voice commands, search engines like Google and Bing take into consideration the actual location of the user.



If your listings are not claimed, optimized and picture perfect, you probably won’t make the cut in the results displayed. Same issue if your accuracy across directories is not at 100%: search engines compare listings in the search for the most accurate information, so if your listing in Foursquare doesn’t match with your listing on Google My Business or even your own Store Locator, you’re toast. One more reason to keep your local presence as healthy as possible.

Consumer reliance on mobile will spearhead all omnichannel marketing efforts.

Last year saw mobile searches surpass desktop, representing about 58% of queries, according to Hitwise.¹⁶ We expect this figure to evolve significantly in the next year as features like voice assistants (check the previous chapter in case you skipped it) and phone wallets become more and more popular.

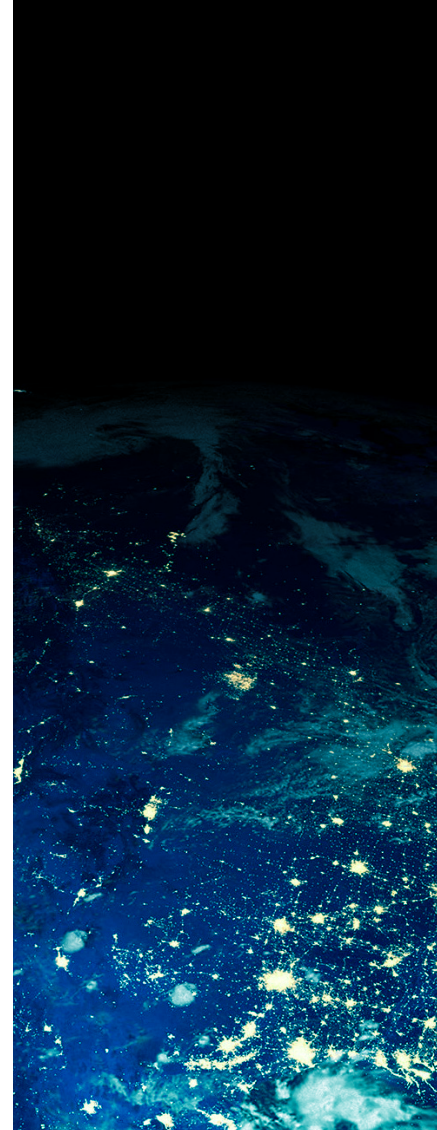
The good news about this increase in usage is the enormous amount of data consumers are producing on an everyday basis. This data allows marketers to build omnichannel campaigns that are targeted to specific consumers. According to Google,

70% of smartphone owners who bought something in a store first turned to their devices for information relevant to that purchase. And when people search on mobile, it tends to lead to action: 92% of those who searched on their phone made a related purchase.¹⁷

This again is nothing but good news and means devices are working as direct catalysts for sales, making mobile the new retail hub. The lines between online and offline are being blurred by seamless experiences that connect a need with an online solution that materializes offline.

The best example of this is Uber. I've been so used to using it that last time I took a cab I just jumped out of the car once at my destination, without paying. Thinking it was going to get automatically charged, my very angry taxi driver had to chase me down the sidewalk. The more consumers are using these seamless experiences, the more chances marketers have to create moments to connect with them, generate loyalty and become indispensable.

Mobile devices are a permanent resident in almost everyone's pockets. Think about it: How often are you truly separated from your smartphone? This quality makes it the perfect omnichannel tool, as it is ... well — omnipresent.





So ... How can this affect your business?

FIRST THINGS FIRST ... EVERYTHING YOU DO NEEDS TO BE OPTIMIZED FOR MOBILE. From your local listings to your company's website, including a flawlessly executed store locator page. No excuses on this one. Have your content mobile-proof, retina-ready and navigable from any portable device — including tablets.

CONSIDER USING GEO-FENCING FOR YOUR OFFLINE LOCATIONS. That way, every time your customers get close to your stores, they can get interesting offers, events or other relevant CTA's. Lure them in when they are nearby and ready to buy.

LOOK FOR WAYS IN WHICH A CUSTOMER'S SHOPPING CART IS CONSISTENT ON HIS/HER COMPUTER, APP AND IN-STORE. Promote online ordering and in-store on the fly pickup. Once someone walks into a store, your chances of upselling increase. According to CNBC, Shopping app downloads grew more than 170% in 2014¹⁸ — it's time to take advantage of this opportunity sitting right in your customer's pockets.

PROMOTE THE USE OF MOBILE GIFT CARDS. This will bring your customer's friends and family to the store as well.

OFFER ONLINE PRODUCT INFORMATION INSIDE YOUR OFFLINE LOCATIONS: Users can scan barcodes and see all product specs, if the product is available in other colors or, in the backstore, and even order it to be delivered if they are in a rush. A research study by Synchrony Financial found that 73% of shoppers conduct research during their in-store visit, with 87% of respondents completing the purchase in-store.¹⁹



The future is now.

Local search already has a huge impact on your business today. That's only going to grow over the next years. If you want consumers to continue stepping through your front door, you need to evolve your local strategy and keep pace with local's own evolution. The first step is appreciating the value of the online to offline economy. From there you can start tailoring your business around attracting customers through local search. The platform that accompanies you on that journey will determine your success as long as it adapts and evolves with technology.

Even though local will look different in 2020, it will rely on the same fundamental principles: Whether Google, Facebook or Apple are the dominant platform, you need to be ready.

The Future is here. And it's waiting for you.

See how SweetIQ can bring the future —and more customers— to all your locations.

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