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**Location, Location, Location**

**By Rick Hendershot, M.A.**

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Now that you've decided you can reach local markets with your website, how should you go about doing it?

In the Part 2 of "Online business and local markets"

([www.small-business-online.com/articles/online-markets-2.shtml](http://www.small-business-online.com/articles/online-markets-2.shtml)) we discussed how the web will eventually reach critical mass and begin to replace services such as the "Yellow Pages" as the default source for local business and service information.

That article was primarily about the role of the major Search Engines in leading this process. Eventually the SEs will develop methods of listing, categorizing, and searching for websites based on location as well as keywords. At the same time we will start to see more and more local-oriented websites coming on stream, and more and more people looking for local services on the web.

What should we do in the meantime?

In the meantime it is up to website owners to aggressively make their presence known and to "push" their services towards local prospects who would otherwise have no idea these online services exist.

The smart website owner will use a three-track approach.

First, she will build her website so it scores well in the search engines.

Second, she will make her website(s) score well with the soon-to-be-popular locally oriented search engines.

Third, she will use a variety of methods to "network" in the local community, and create an online "brand" that is easily found by customers and prospects.

Let's discuss these strategies one at a time.

## 1. Scoring well in the Search Engines

There is an endless amount of information about "Search Engine Optimization". If you know nothing about "SEO" (Search Engine Optimization), here are some of the most important general principles to be aware of:

Search Engines use "keywords" to find web pages and web sites. That means you must build your site from the ground up around specific keywords.

Not all keywords are equally useful. Some are too popular (e.g., "web marketing") and you stand almost no chance of getting good ranking in the SEs with them.

Others are rarely searched on (e.g., "online strategies"), and so nobody will see your site if you focus on them. There are ways of analyzing keywords to pre-determine which are most likely to bring you traffic. This service is built into Ken Evoy's Site Build It! (<http://buildit.sitesell.com/ebizstrategies.html>) and is also available through my service called the SBO WebReport.

You must build your pages and your site(s) in certain ways to maximize your chances of "scoring" well with the SEs. This is the only way you can get good ranking when people search on your keywords

You must consistently "submit" your optimized web pages to the major SEs.

You must build valuable content into your site, so it is actually worth looking at.

You must seek alliances with other web owners in your field, and exchange links with them.

## 2. Scoring Well in Local Searches

If you want LOCAL traffic, structure your pages and sites to clearly associate them with the desired local geographic area. For instance, if you sell landscaping services in the area around Cincinnati, build consistent mention of your service area (Cincinnati and surrounding area) into your most important pages. This is based on the premise that Google-style surveys of your pages are looking for hints within your pages about your geographic service area. You might as well help them along as much as possible.

Where is the best place to mention these things? There is no definitive answer yet, but the following are safe bets:

- In your page names (e.g., landscaping-cincinnati.html)
- In your meta-tags (title, keywords, and description)
- In the body of your page, as near to the top as possible
- In alt-tags, comments, etc.

In other words, use the same strategies for your location hints as you use for your most important keywords.

### 3. Networking in your local area

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is to define what I call a "Location-Focused Identity" -- an LFI. If you don't do this, you will constantly be debating whether your website is too focused on the local market, or not focused enough. Websites are cheap, so my advice is to create a locally-oriented website specifically to reach the local market. By making it local-user-friendly you will have created a base for your local promotion efforts. Here are some good places to start:

If you can, give your website an easy-to-remember name with a clear connection to the name of your company or service.

Your LFI should also be your domain name. Try to build your location name right into it. For example, [www.indian-food-toronto.com](http://www.indian-food-toronto.com), or [www.pools-orlando.com](http://www.pools-orlando.com).

If you have a general non-local oriented site (like ours called [www.tradeshow-display-experts.com](http://www.tradeshow-display-experts.com)) go

ahead and create a completely new site to reach the local market. It could consist of only one or two pages with links to your main site. ([www.popups-toronto.com](http://www.popups-toronto.com), [www.popups-canada.com](http://www.popups-canada.com), [www.vinyl-banners-usa.com](http://www.vinyl-banners-usa.com), [www.seattle-pizza.com](http://www.seattle-pizza.com)). The good news is that generally these names are still available -- so get them while you can!

A name like this should be searchable (so it is findable using the Search Engines), but even more important it must be memorable for people in the local market you are trying to reach, so you can make it the basis for your local promotion efforts.

Now that you have a Location-Focused Identity (LFI) you can start to promote it locally. Here are some fairly obvious strategies:

Do everything you can to develop your LFI into a "brand" with your customers, contacts, and prospects. Let's say it is "seattle-pizza.com". Plaster this on all your promotions. You want customers and prospects to remember your site name, and to find it without having to search for it.

Register your new site with locally-oriented and industry-specific directories or link exchanges that are likely to send traffic your way. The point of these links is different from link exchanges where you want to get higher SE ranking. These links are for generating traffic.

Create informal alliances with other locally-oriented, non-competitive businesses in your industry. The two best sources for such alliances are first, your customer list, and second, your supplier list. What form could these alliances take? Here are some suggestions: Joint sponsorship of online (or offline) contests, joint sponsorship of golf tournaments, joint participation in local trade shows.

Offer sponsorships or special discounts for products or services to high visibility local organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, service clubs, community sports associations -- where you are likely to get exposure for your locally-oriented services. Be sure to insist that your LFI is prominently

(and tactfully) displayed.

Local offline advertising.

Generally I do NOT recommend promoting your online identity with (relatively expensive and inefficient) offline advertising. But using local advertising to promote your

LFI may be an exception. It will generally depend on your product. The best scenario is to create offline advertising that does "double-duty" -- that has immediate promotional value (and immediate returns), but also helps build your "brand". A good example might be the Indian restaurant that uses direct mail to generate local business lunch traffic. This same clientele (local business people) will be prime prospects for online strategies: establish your brand and they will almost effortlessly find you online.

Locally-oriented online advertising.

This is inherently inefficient because of the broad-brush reach of online advertising. But some techniques such as Google adwords allow you to target specific keywords (e.g., "Indian food Denver"). I suspect, however, if you structure your pages properly, you will find it fairly easy to get good position in the regular Google search rankings for such terms, making it unnecessary to "buy" position with ads.

Conclusion

This last point (about the relative ease of getting good SE ranking with local keywords) is one of the most exciting aspects of the quest to reach local markets. If you define your pages correctly, you should very quickly be able to score well on searches like "Indian Food Denver" or "Sod Hamilton"...because there are relatively few businesses catering to these terms. As web surfers become more local-services savvy, the number of businesses will also increase. But the number of Indian Food restaurants in Denver is unlikely to ever reach the point where you won't score well on a local search.

So you can see how this opens up fantastic opportunities for even moderately persistent online marketers interested in reaching local markets.

These suggestions just begin to scratch the surface of possible ways to promote your Location-Focused Identity (LFI). The most important thing is to CREATE ONE.

Once you have created a memorable LFI, ways of promoting it will tend to fall into your lap.

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This article is called "Online Business and Local Markets, Part 3: Strategies for reaching local markets"

## **Selecting The Location Of The Wedding Ceremony**

**By James Calvin**

## Location, Location, Location

The wedding ceremony is where two individuals unite to become one. Choosing the location for this event would seem a simple task, but it's actually one that requires much planning and coordination, especially if a non-traditional ceremony is being planned.

Many couples will hold the wedding ceremony at a house of worship, usually one that the bride, the groom, or some other family member attends. When this is the case, selecting the location is fairly easy, provided the date is available. But what happens when the bride- and groom-to-be are of different denominations? More tricky still, how is the situation handled when the couple doesn't have any religious affiliation?

That's when the couple needs to get together to discuss their wedding ceremony location options. And there are many. Selecting the location of the ceremony should happen well in advance of the wedding date, up to 12 months if possible. If you wait too long to reserve the location, you may find it's already booked.

Besides a house of worship, wedding ceremony locations can be practically anywhere - at home, at a country or yacht club, outdoors at a local, national or state park, on a yacht, on a tropical island, at a mountaintop retreat, in a medieval castle, at Disney World - you name it, it's probably capable of accommodating a wedding ceremony.

Before selecting a location, however, you've got to make sure it'll accommodate your needs. Is the location large enough to accommodate all your guests? Are dressing rooms available? Are there electrical outlets for acoustics and/or music? Is the location easily accessible, especially for those with special needs? Can you find someone to officiate at the location?

The amount you'll pay will vary from location to location. When you're finding out the costs, be sure to ask what is included with the price. Make sure the items mentioned are written out on the contract, too. You'll likely be asked to provide a deposit to reserve the date. This needs to be reflected on the contract as well as the balance amount and due date.

There's more to consider about the wedding ceremony than just the location. The music and the vows need special attention, especially if you wish to break out of the 'traditional' mode. The music may be included with the location. For example, oftentimes a church will use its own organist. However, if your budget allows, you may wish to write your own wedding songs and hire a soloist and accompanist to perform them. Or you can hire musicians to match the theme of your wedding. If these types of arrangements are in your budget, be sure to reserve the talent far in advance, right after you've secured the wedding ceremony location.

You can also write your own vows or make modifications to traditional vows. This puts a truly personal touch on the event. Just be sure to give a copy of your version of the vows to the person officiating so that everyone knows what to say.

Finally! James Calvin has released *A Simple, Step-By-Step Guide To Throwing The Most Unforgettable, Wedding – And How You Can Literally Save Thousands In The Making Of YOUR Wedding!* Go to

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