

The **SEO** **JUICE**

January 15th, 2024



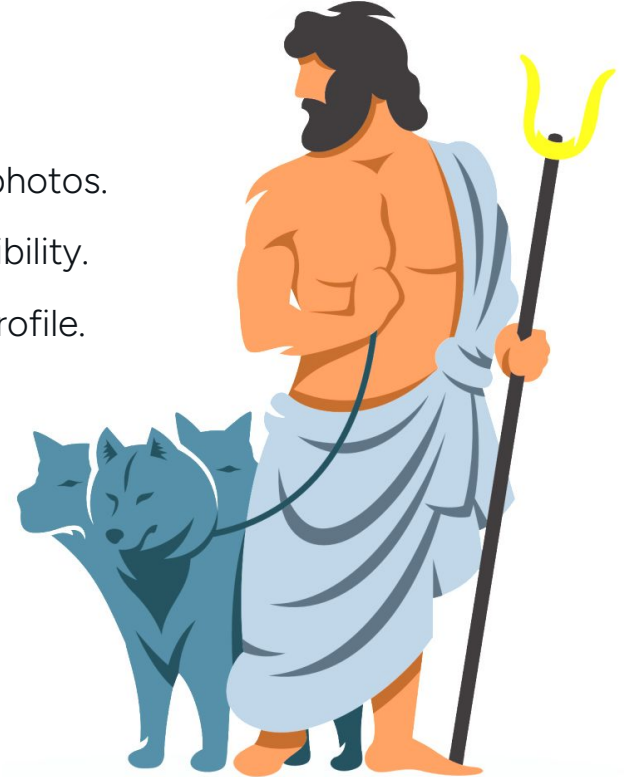
SOCI¹

Squeezing the most out of your local SEO.

3 Local SEO Truths and a Myth



- 1) Your Local Landing Page rank affects your GBP rank.
- 2) Google prefers to highlight your photos over your customer's photos.
- 3) Adding a Service Area is a great way to expand your search visibility.
- 4) You can ask and answer your own Questions on your Google Profile.



3 Local SEO Truths and a Myth



Your Local Landing Page rank affects your GBP rank.

How Google determines local ranking

Local results are based primarily on relevance, distance, and prominence. A combination of these factors helps us find the best match for your search. For example, our algorithms might decide that a business that's farther away from your location is more likely to have what you're looking for than a business that's closer, and therefore rank it higher in local results.

Relevance



Distance



Prominence



Prominence refers to how well known a business is. Some places are more prominent in the offline world, and search results try to reflect this in local ranking. For example, famous museums, landmark hotels, or well-known store brands are also likely to be prominent in local search results.

Prominence is also based on information that Google has about a business, from across the web, like links, articles, and directories. Google review count and review score factor into local search ranking. More reviews and positive ratings can improve your business' local ranking. Your position in web results is also a factor, so search engine optimization (SEO) best practices apply.

3 Local SEO Truths and a Myth



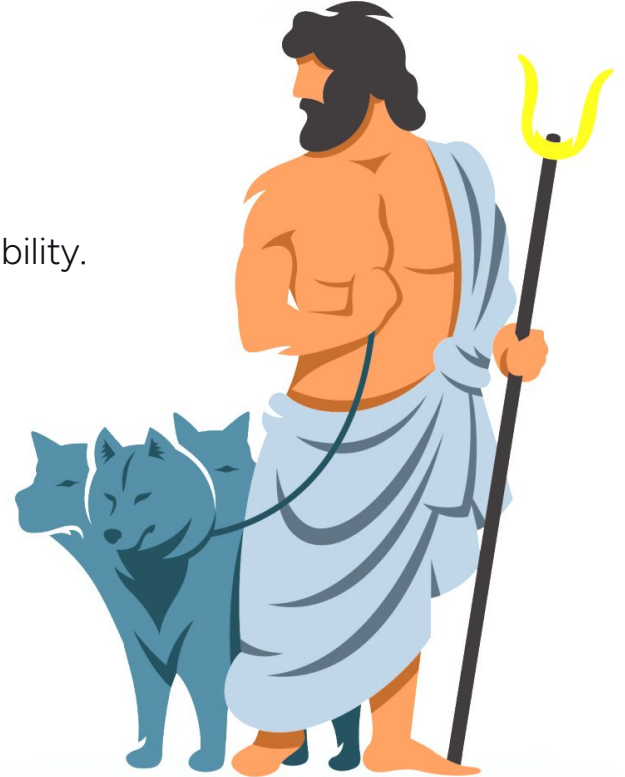
Google prefers to highlight your photos over your customer's photos.

If the cover photo you select is low-quality or if other sources suggest that it's not the best photo to represent your business, a user-submitted photo may be selected instead.

3 Local SEO Truths and a Myth



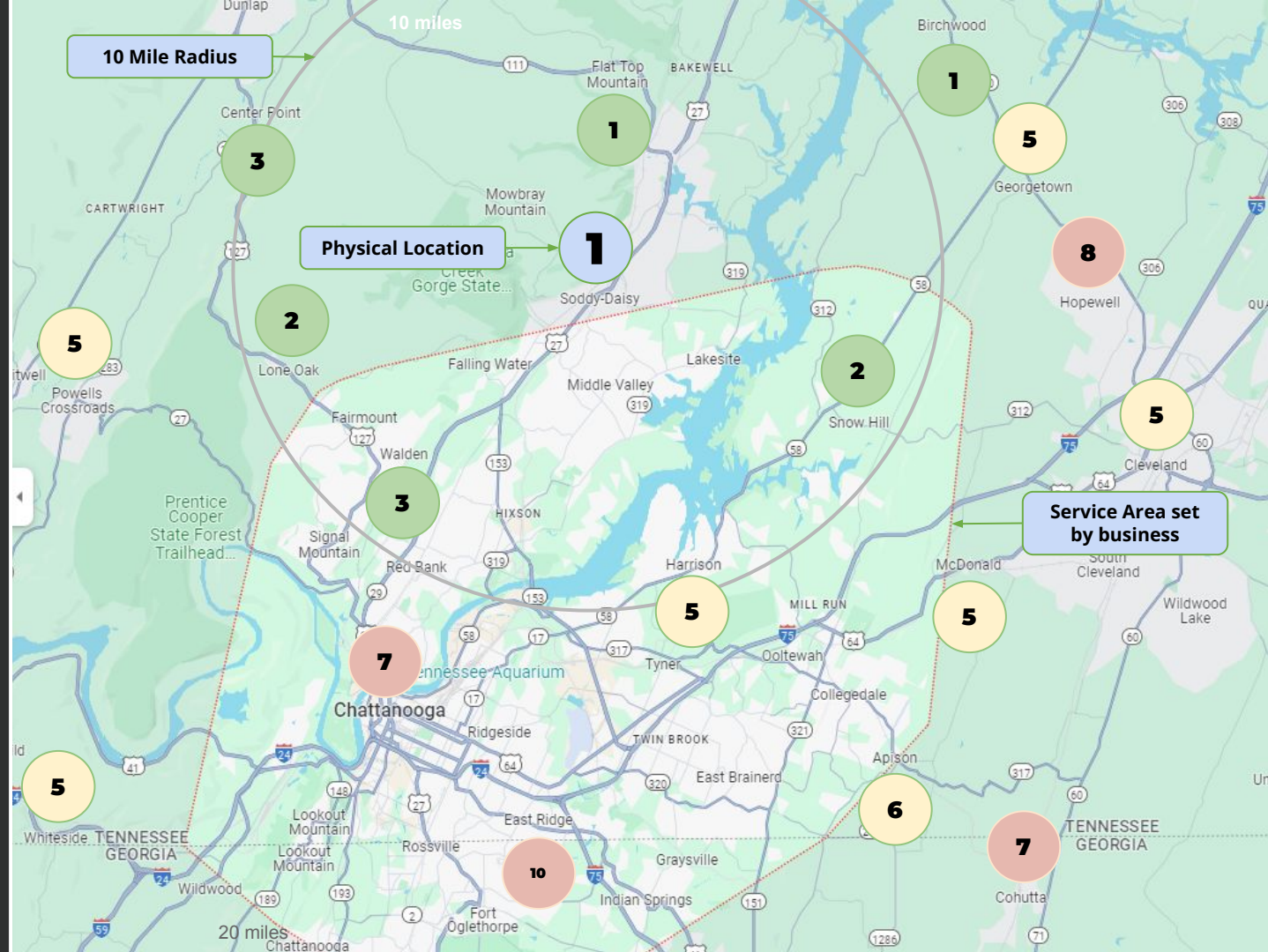
Adding a Service Area is a great way to expand your search visibility.



Local Search Ranking

Service Area Business in Chattanooga

Observed proximity based ranking despite being a Service Area Business with a hidden address



3 Local SEO Truths and a Myth



You can ask and answer your own Questions on your Google Profile.



Your SOCI Team



Kaci McBride
Director, Customer
Experience



Michael Snow
Local SEO Evangelist

This Month:

- **Industry News**
The latest news in Local Search and what it means for you
- **Local SEO Prognostication**
Our Predictions and Tips for 2025
- **Checkbox Optimization**
New Google Categories, Attributes & Features.
- **Caught in the Wild**
New features we've spied in Local Search results





Industry News

The latest in Local Search
and what it means for you



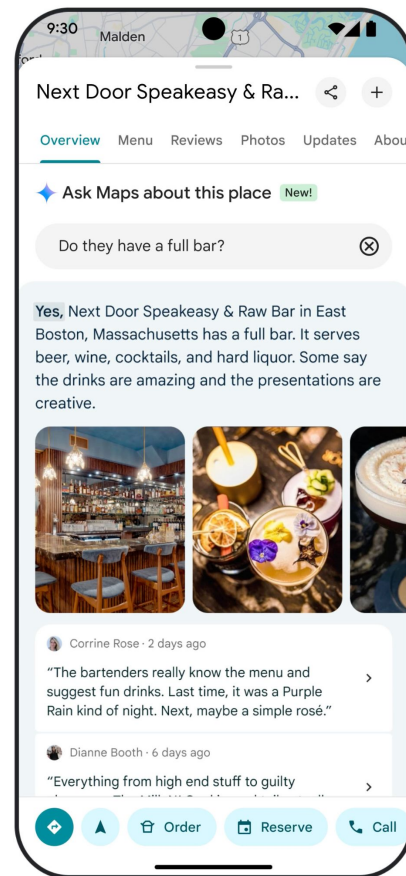
New Maps Feature

ASK MAPS ABOUT THIS PLACE

First announced by Google in October, the AI, Gemini-powered feature, **Ask Maps about this place**, appears to be rolling out more widely to Google maps users according to a recent article from NearMedia.

In answering Ask Maps questions Google relies first on content in the business profile, GBP reviews and the business website before it will access third party content, and even social media.

This feature could provide valuable insight into what Google knows about your business.





New Maps Feature

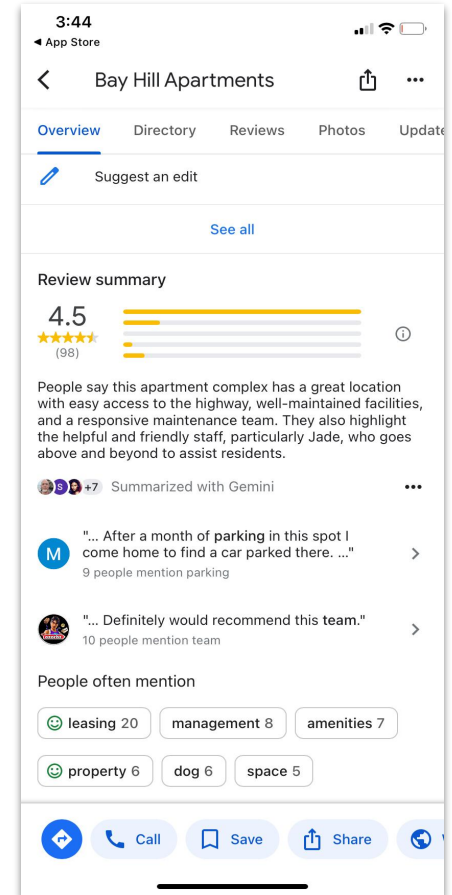
REVIEWS SUMMARIZED WITH GEMINI

Announced at the same time as "Ask Maps", AI/Gemini Summarized Reviews are likely to have a bigger impact on customer engagement.

Per Google: "Google uses AI to analyze people's reviews on a place and compile a helpful summary highlighting common sentiment and tips.

Each summary is based on English reviews from the past year and updated weekly to reflect recent opinions. The number of reviews used to compile the summary may be shown.

Review summaries aren't available for all places. This can be due to factors like limited reviews or a lack of consistent themes, among other reasons."





GBP Updates Triggering Reverification

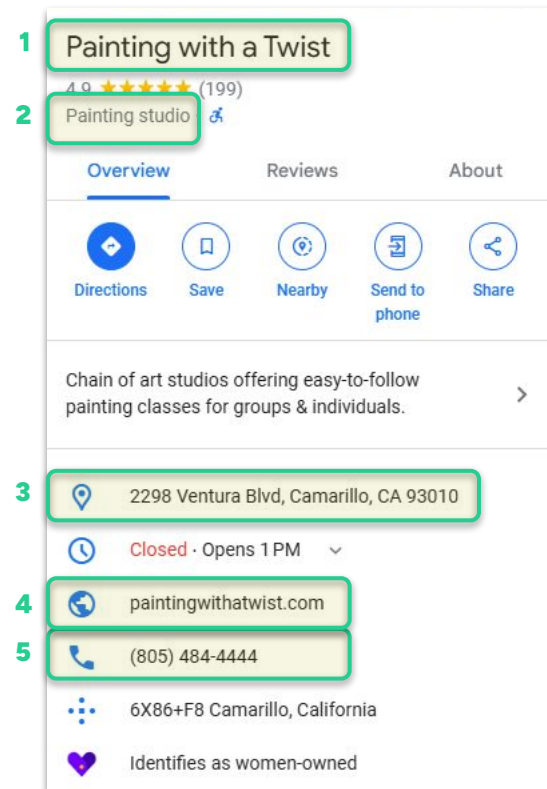
WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR



Starting in late September, SOCi, [along with others in the industry](#), observed an increase reverifications needed for businesses making updates to their Google Business Profiles.

Though Google has not officially (or unofficially) acknowledged the issue, there has been some consensus across the industry on what changes are most likely to trigger a reverification. They are attributes businesses typically don't often update once a listing has been created:

1. Business name
2. Categories (primary & secondary)
3. Address
4. Website URL
5. Phone Number





GBP Updates Triggering Reverification



WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

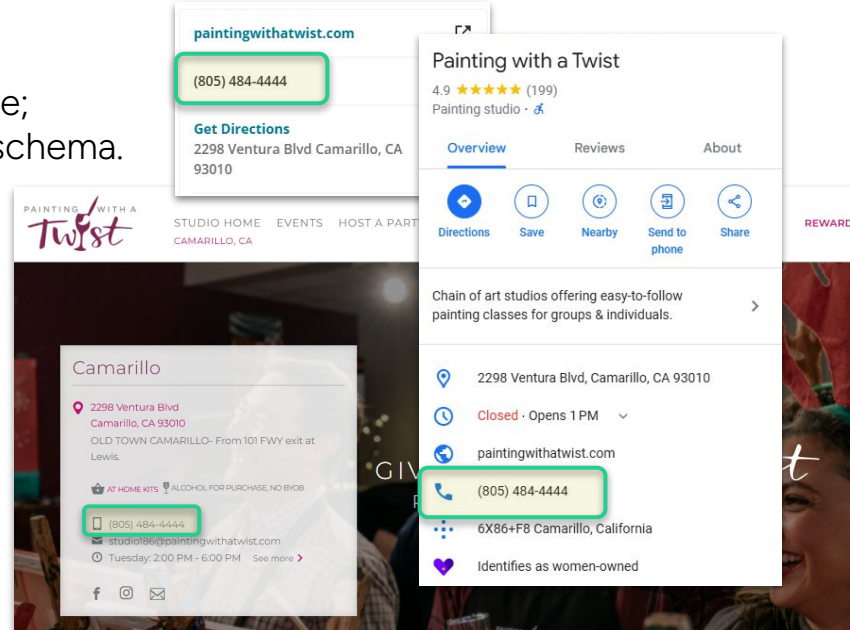
The possibility of reverification should NOT stop a business from making necessary changes that will improve SEO. If you have a new phone number, or there's a new category that will bring more search traffic to your listing, add it. Just be sure to take the following actions beforehand:

Validate the change being made:

- Ensure local pages are updated to support the change; check title tag, meta description, on page copy, and schema.
- Make the same changes across search, social and major directories.

Be prepared in case action is needed:

- Notify location manager/owners that their help may be needed in reverifying their location.
- Notify listings provider so teams can monitor if action is needed.
- Make changes in small batches when possible.





Is Google Really Removing 5 Star Reviews?

DON'T PANIC



Google's review deletions: Why 5-star reviews are disappearing

Google is deleting 5-star reviews at an alarming rate. Learn what it means for your business and how to safeguard your online reputation.

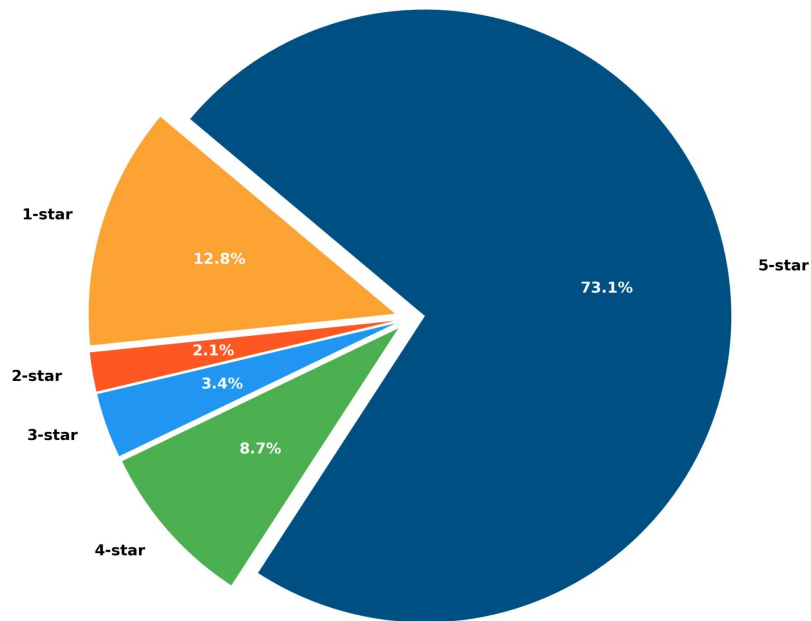
The 5-star shocker: Google's war on fake reviews

While you might expect negative reviews to be the primary target, our analysis revealed that a staggering 73.1% of deleted reviews were actually 5-star ratings.

This indicates that Google is actively combating fake and incentivized reviews, aiming to maintain the integrity of its platform.

The major spikes in review deletion for our customer base occurred on Oct. 12, Oct. 28, and Nov. 1.

Percentage of Deleted Reviews by Rating





Is Google Really Removing 5 Star Reviews?

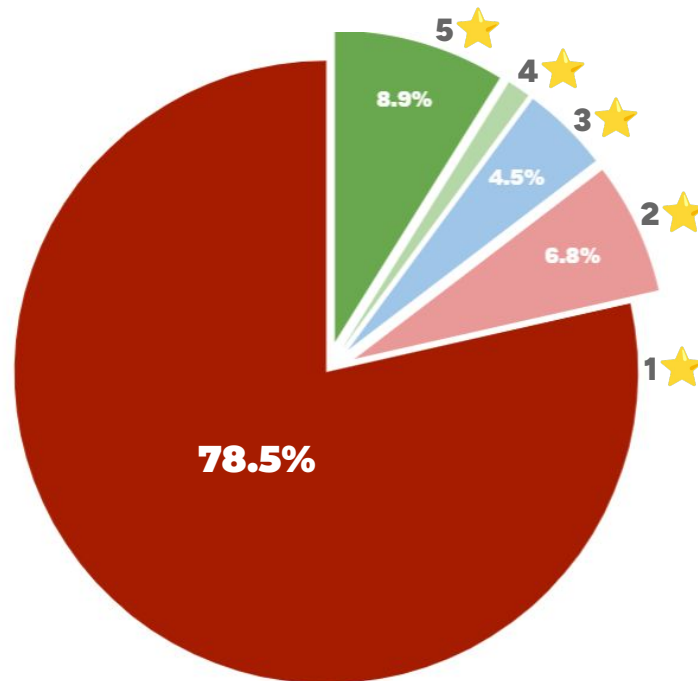
SOCI'S FINDINGS



Insights from 1081 reviews removed from approx. 360 thousand enterprise locations over a one month period.

- Nearly 4-in-5 review removals were for 1 star reviews.
- All of the reviews removed had review text.
- A surprising number of reviews were from people who had not visited the location.
- A large number of reviews contained content Google would consider low-quality, irrelevant or distracting content (i.e. misspellings, gimmicky character use, gibberish, etc.), or offensive.

Percentage of Deleted Reviews by Rating





Is Google Really Removing 5 Star Reviews?

SOCI'S FINDINGS



This is a really big place for anxiety. I need the badge disturbed f f f f fi hi Vicki hi o oh no bk oh hi hi oh oh...



Looking forward to the shop opening up!



5 stars so people see this. 0 stars in reality. Worked here. Worst company I've ever worked for. Confirmed with me fu...



Made appt. and took my new Honda to Service Dept. for two minor issues. Greeted as soon as I entered. Jerry took ca...



Never been there



Rumors have it they could be closing early soon.



Is there any apartment available for rent thanks



Visit this store in Denver all the time. Can't wait!



book with Mackenzie and Newt 



Never visited before but something tells me this is a special place. Definitely a bucket list visit for me.



It was a very good job and I hope you have a great day today to go I think so just let me check with my manager. The ...



SEO Prognostication

Our Local SEO Predictions for 2025

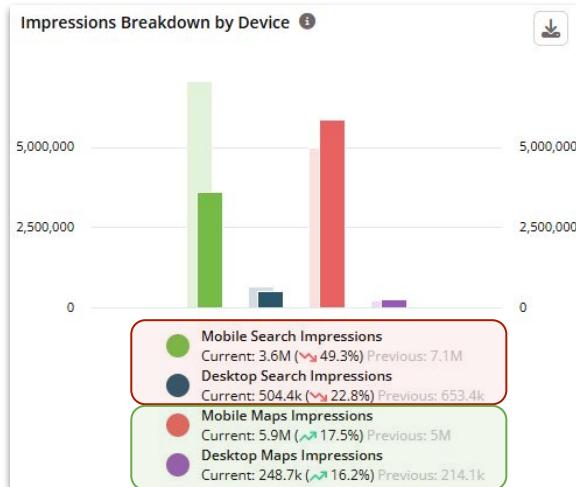
TM

SEO Predictions for 2025

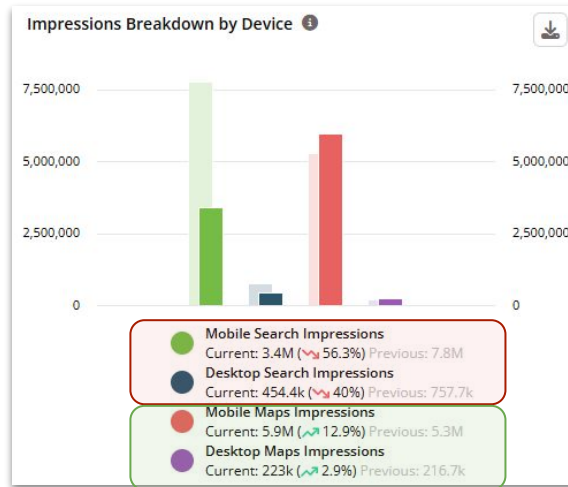
LOCAL SEARCH VISIBILITY



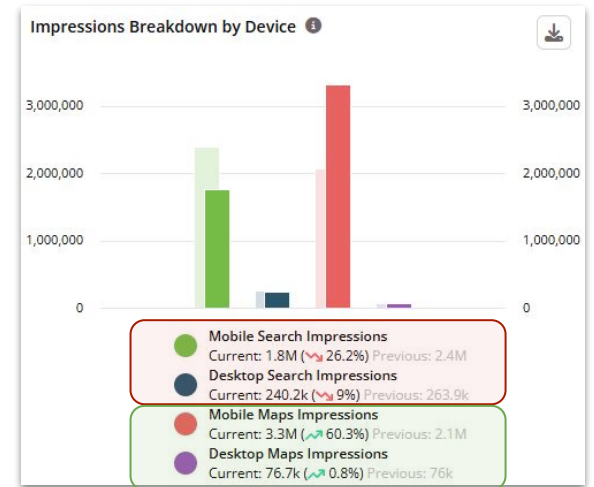
Search Impressions will continue to decline; Map Impressions will continue to increase.



Retail



Food & Beverage



Automotive Services

SEO Predictions for 2025

LOCAL SEARCH VISIBILITY



Search Impressions will continue to decline; Map Impressions will continue to increase.

Google search results for "pickleball shoes". The page shows a grid of sponsored shoe products from various brands like Nike, Skechers, and ASICS. The left sidebar includes filters for Department, Color, Athlete Style, Price, Sort by, Features, Support Type, Men's Size, Stores, Weight, Material, Season, Women's Size, and Closure Style. The main content area displays several shoe listings with images, prices, and brand names.

Retail

Google search results for "pancakes". The page features a featured recipe titled "Good Old-Fashioned Pancakes Recipe (with Video)" by Allrecipes. Below the main recipe, there are sections for "Recipes" and "Nutrition facts". The nutrition facts table is as follows:

Nutrient	Amount(g)	DV(%)
Total Fat	2.7 g	4%
Cholesterol	17 mg	5%
Sodium	124 mg	5%
Potassium	37 mg	1%

Food & Beverage

Google search results for "Fix a flat tire". The page displays a featured video titled "Fix-a-Flat Tire Repair Aerosol" and a section for "People also ask" with questions like "How long can you drive on a tire with Fix-a-Flat?". There is also a "Videos" section with several video thumbnails and titles related to tire repair.

Automotive Services



New Local Pack Feature: OPEN IN MAPS



First spotted in late October, but seemingly rolling out wider in early January, Open in Maps does exactly what it advertises: it relaunches the search in maps. Customers can still get directions from the traditional Local Pack search path (i.e. "More business", "More places"), but likely think of Maps as the same thing.

While not an Earth-shatteringly new feature, this new option could cause a further shift in GBP impression reporting from Search to Maps for brick-and-mortar businesses where customers are explicitly looking for directions to a local business.

Businesses :

- Miracle Mile Advisors**
4.3 ★★★★★ (6) · Financial consultant
15+ years in business · 11300 W Olympic Blvd #800
Open · Closes 5 PM · (310) 246-1243
Website Directions
- Empress Investment Group**
5.0 ★★★★★ (73) · Financial planner
10+ years in business · 321 N Larchmont Blvd Suit...
Open · Closes 5:30 PM · (310) 450-2904
"Her expertise in investing and the financial markets is second to none."
Website Directions
- Wealth Management Partners of Los A...**
5.0 ★★★★★ (59) · Financial planner
7+ years in business · Encino, CA
Open · Closes 8 PM · (818) 600-6614
"He took the time to get to know me and listen to my financial goals."
Website Directions

[More businesses →](#)

The map on the right shows a local area with several red location pins. A button labeled "Open in Maps" is circled in green in the top right corner of the map view.

SEO Predictions for 2025

LOCAL SEARCH VISIBILITY



Recommendations for Success.

- Take advantage of Google offerings that provide additional Search Visibility.
 - Retail: Merchant Center
 - Restaurants: Menus, Offer Posts
 - All: Images, Posts
- Optimize Social Posts and Videos for Local Search.
- Prioritize review management; turn online feedback into operational improvements.
- Optimize for Customer Choice.

The screenshot displays Google search results for men's suits. The 'In stores nearby' section features five listings with images of suits, prices, and ratings. The 'Nearby offers and events' section shows a '\$5 MEAL DEAL' from Dunkin' and a promotion from Jimmy E's Bar + Grill. A 'Short videos' section at the bottom shows two videos about trash removal in Palmdale, CA.

In stores nearby				
Nearby, 2 mi	Nearby, 7 mi	Nearby, 17 mi	Nearby, 2 mi	Nearby, 2 mi
Premier Flex Performance Slim...	Kenneth Cole Men's Slim-Fit Techni-Co...	Canali Men's Wool Two-Piece Suit	Premier Flex Performance Slim...	Haggar Men's Stretch Heather T...
\$120.00	\$360.00	\$2,150.00	\$120.00	\$130.00
Kohl's	Macy's & more	Neiman Marcus	Kohl's	Kohl's & more
Free delivery	Free delivery by Jan 21	Free delivery	Free delivery	Free delivery
4.6 ★★★★★ (143)	4.6 ★★★★★ (320)	4.3 ★★★★★ (3)	4.6 ★★★★★ (143)	4.4 ★★★★★ (307)

Nearby offers and events
From local businesses

- Jump into January with our NEW \$5 Meal Deal! Enjoy a medium coffee and two...
4.0 ★ (880)
Dunkin' Google · 2 weeks ago
- Your chances to check out our Sunday Brunch are getting slimmer! Come ge...
Jimmy E's Bar + Grill Instagram · 2 weeks ago

Short videos

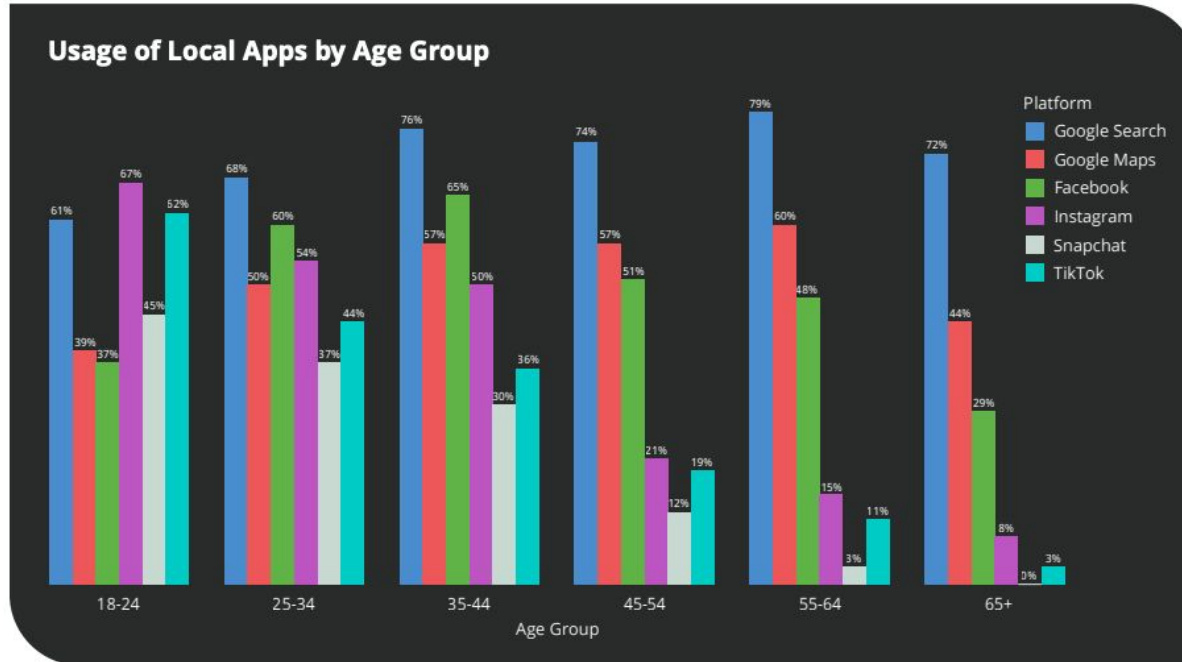
- Trash removal in Palmdale ca We...
Facebook · Family J...
- Trash removal in Palmdale...
Facebook · Family J...
- Junivice
TikTok

SEO Predictions for 2025

SEARCH BEHAVIOR



Changes in search behavior, like video search & AI "search" may impact informational type local searches.



The skills that AI tools are most improving

% of AI tool users who say they've most improved the following through using AI tools



Which of the following skills have you most improved by using AI tools?

GWl Zeitgeist April 2024 6,798 AI tool users in 12 markets aged 16-64



Informational & Decision Local Queries:

“Which pediatrician should I use in Pittsburgh, PA?”

“Help me plan a night out in NYC, I really like sushi, dancing, and karaoke”

“My faucet just broke.. Do I need a plumber? Okay, which plumbers are top rated in my area?”

SEO Predictions for 2025

SEARCH BEHAVIOR



Recommendations for Success.

- Don't panic - check your traffic sources!
 - Metrics are likely to shuffle around. Observe your total performance outside of traditional Google traffic.
- Maximize your use of Google's tools
 - Don't shy away from Google posts, merchant center, or the other various features Google rolls out for adoption on listings.

SEO Predictions for 2025

VIDEO SEARCH BEHAVIOR



If Tik-Tok is Banned, YouTube Shorts May be the Answer

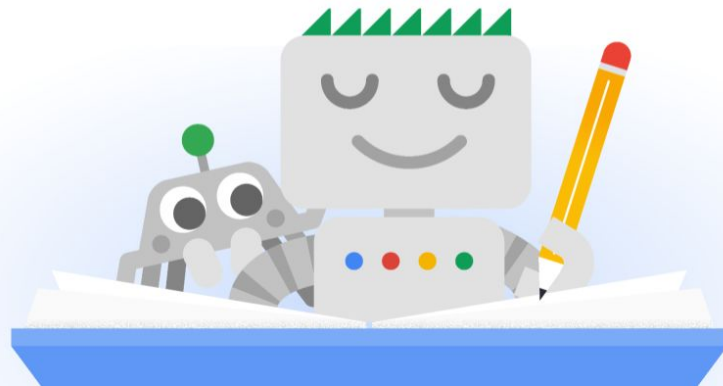


SEO Predictions for 2025

THE NEW RANKING FACTORS



- **Google Merchant Center** - Google added a passage to its help page on local ranking which explicitly states Merchant Center inventory is a ranking signal.



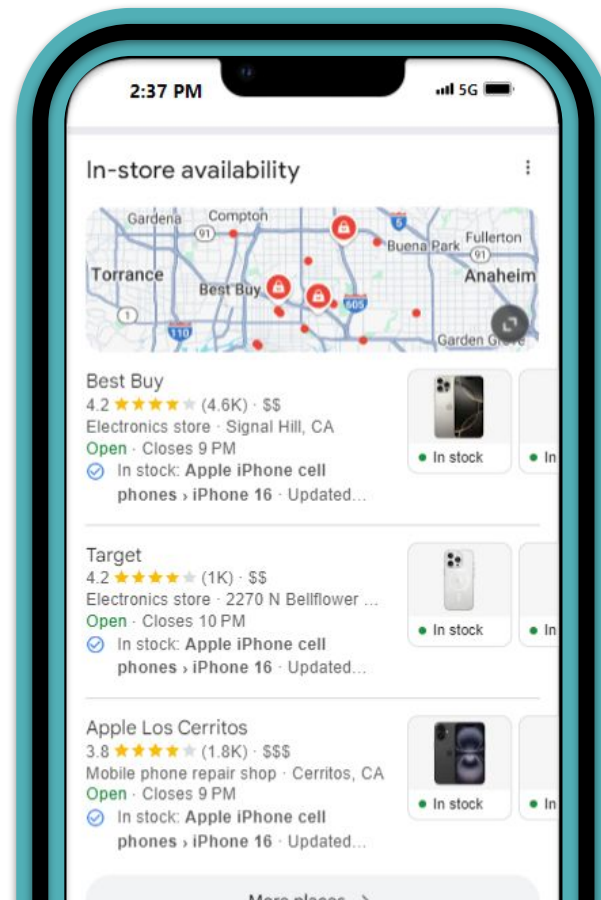


What does Google have to say about it?

From Google's help page "[Showcase in-store products on Google Search & Maps automatically](#)":

When you add in-store products, it may help:

- **Increase your store's visibility.** Your in-store products can show in search results and on your Business Profile on Google Search and Maps, so customers know what you sell before they visit your store.
- **Show customers what's available in your store.** Many customers use Google to check whether stores near them stock the products they want. When you add your products to Google, they can easily check if the product is available in your store.

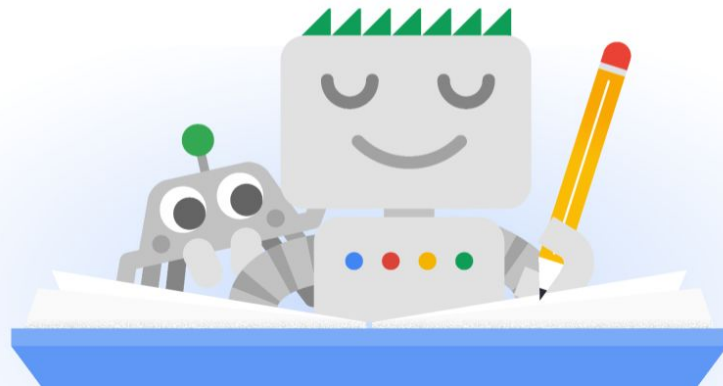


SEO Predictions for 2025

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- **Menus** - Recent studies show menu items are a ranking factor.





Menu Items in GBP

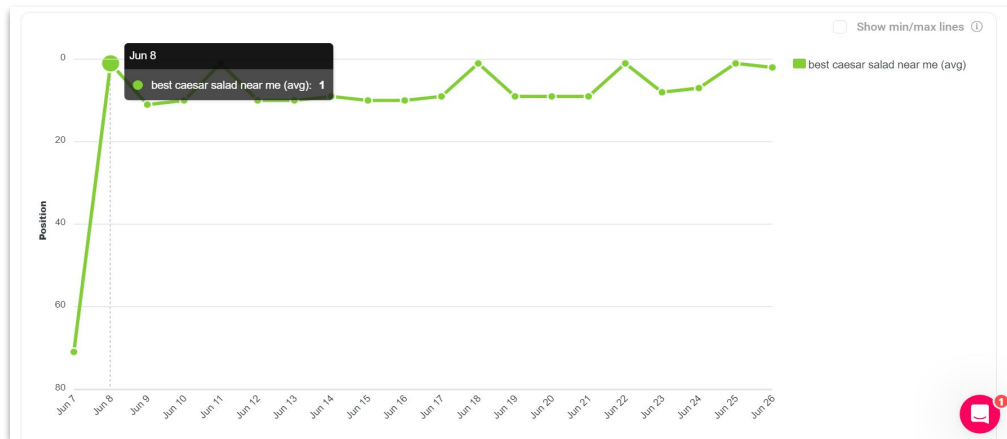
LIKELY RANKING FACTOR



Claudia Tomina at ReputationArm published an interesting blog that seems to indicate that menu items listed on GBPs are a ranking factor when searchers are looking for specific dishes near them.

This Matters:

If there is indeed a direct correlation between a menu item's name and the search query, the food and beverage industry may want to rethink fancy names for popular drinks and dishes with high search volumes.

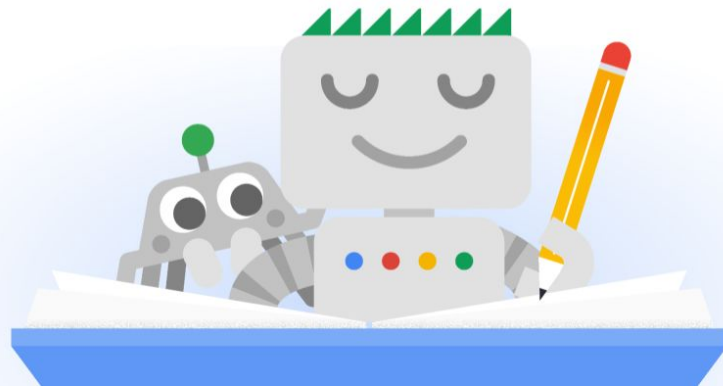


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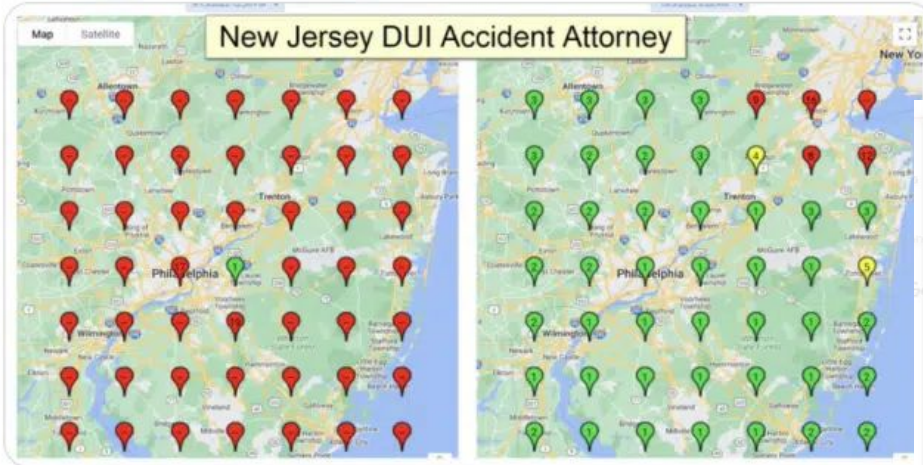
Joy Hawkins ✓
@JoyanneHawkins



📄 Do Services in GBP Impact Rankings?

🐼 We redid a 2020 case study and the new results may be shocking!

sterlingsky.ca/services-in-go...



8:51 AM · Feb 21, 2023 · 27.9K Views



← Add services ⋮ ×

Air conditioning repair service
Primary category

Add services you offer and get discovered by customers

+ Cleaning
+ A/C system dismantlement
+ Ductless heating & A/C services

+ Install thermostat
+ Portable A/C services
+ HVAC duct & vent repair

+ Ventilated ceiling installation
+ Ventilated ceiling repairs

Don't see a service you offer? Create your own

[+ Add custom service](#)

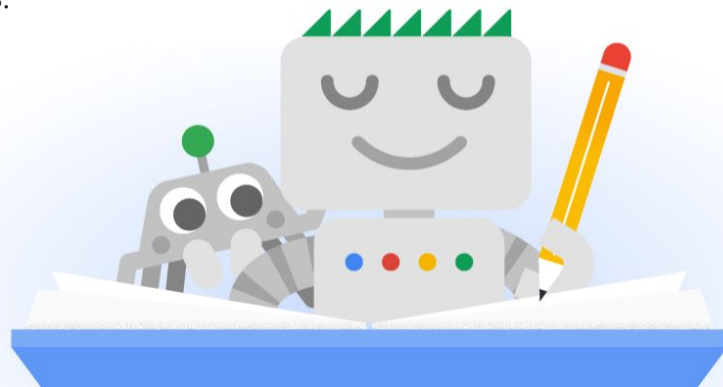
Cancel
Save

SEO Predictions for 2025

THE NEW RANKING FACTORS



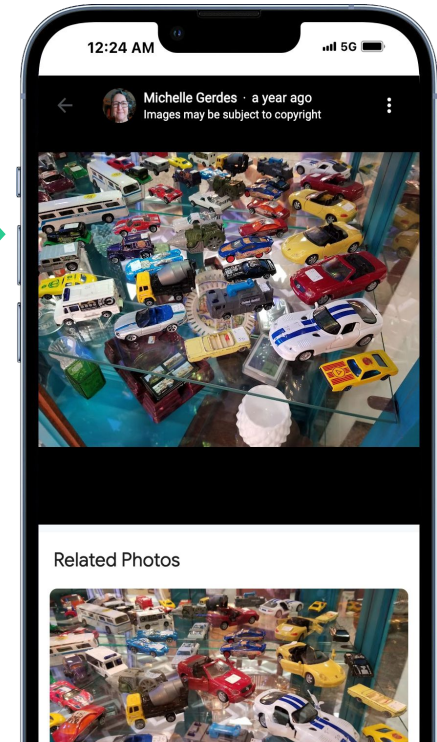
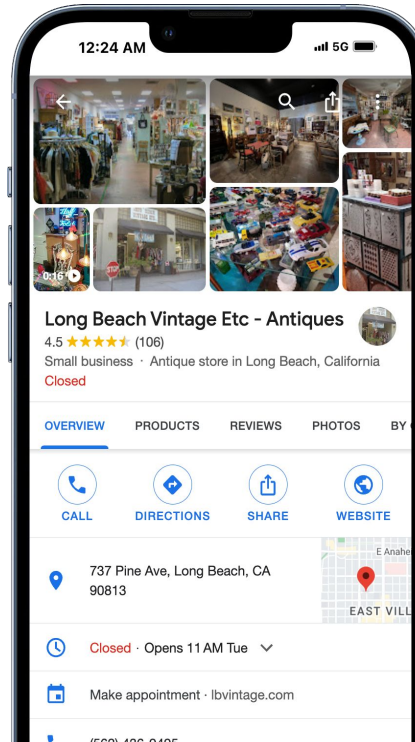
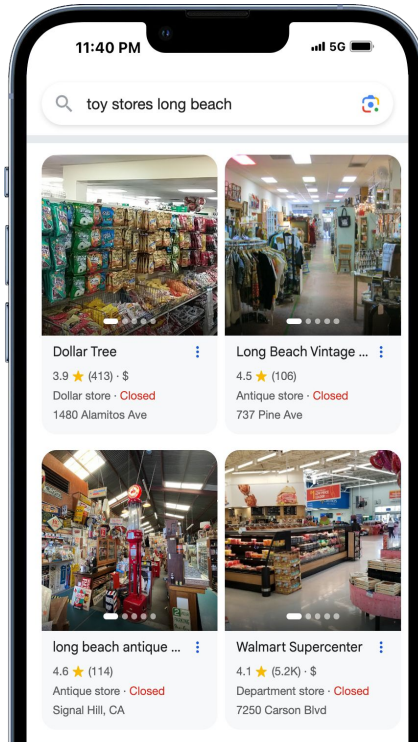
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CCO Spotlight

SHELFIES

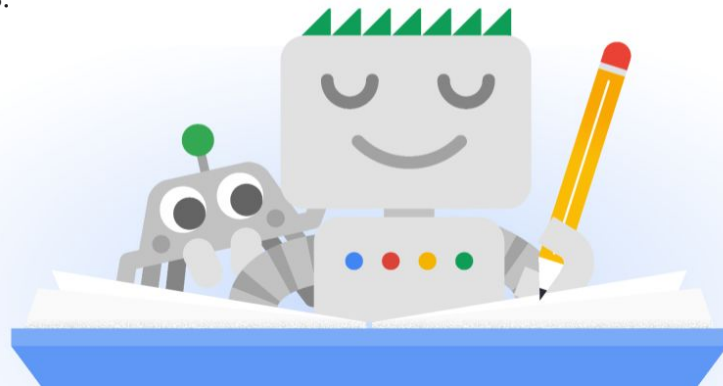


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- **Business Hours** - Businesses rank higher in local search results when they are open.



Business Hours

THE NEW RANKING FACTORS

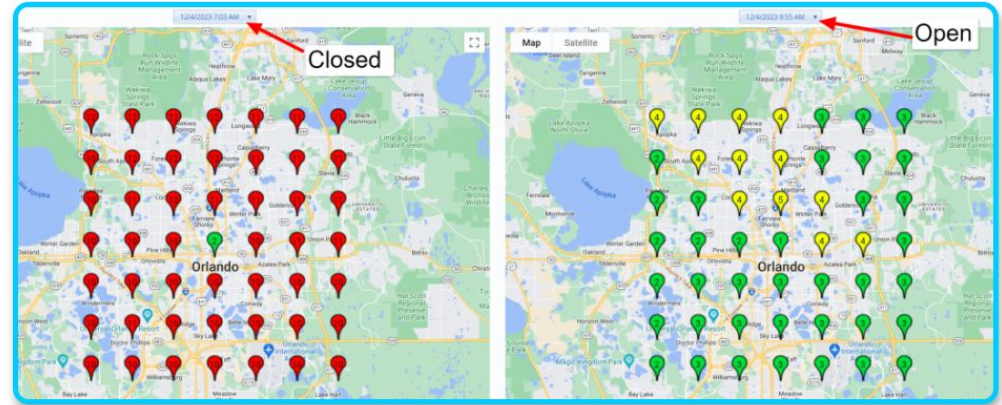


Though it was announced as a “New Ranking Factor”, Sterling Sky recently called attention to a search consideration SOCI has been discussing with customers for some time:

Business Hours Affect Rank.

Not a ranking factor in the traditional sense (i.e. publishing/not publishing business hours will affect how a profile ranks), Google search results tends to favor businesses that are open over ones that are closed for the day.

Does this mean businesses should set their hours to 24/7 to rank better?



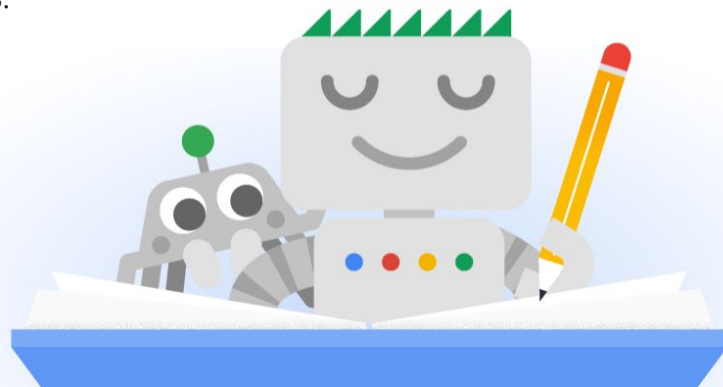
Absolutely not. If your business is closed, the hours in Google should reflect this. Customers who engage a business they believe to be open, may post negative reviews or turn to a more reliable competitor for future purchases or service requests if they are, in fact, closed.

SEO Predictions for 2025

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- **Social Links** - Google confirmed that Social signals (i.e. follows, likes, shares) are beginning to factor into their local search algorithm.



SEO Predictions for 2025

UNCOVERED RANKING FACTORS



Ranking factors validated by the [Google Algorithm leak](#):

- **Customer Engagement** - There were notable mentions of clicks and length of clicks within the leaked Google API documents. These mentions support the long-suspected notion that your clicks act as a type of “vote” for the algorithm. This may also include clicks on GBP.
- **Brand Authority** - Google appears to be looking for and correlating references to entities from multiple sources, including onsite content and even YouTube video transcripts. Entities are concepts related to Google’s Knowledge Graph, which includes local businesses.





Checkbox Optimization

New GBP Categories, Attributes & More...



New GBP Categories



Retail:

Drinking water supplier
Tractor parts store

Education:

Montessori preschool

Services:

Energy advisory service



New GBP Attributes

PROPERTY



New attributes for the Property Industry were recently added to GBP:

- Has elevator
- Has golf simulator

Surprisingly, Google has still not added the ability to control common attributes like “Laundry room”, “Outdoor space”, & “Maintenance” which regularly appear as Highlights along side selectable attributes.

Highlights: Pets welcome · Swimming pool · Laundry room

Business information

About Contact Location Hours More

Let customers know more about your business by showing attributes on your Business Profile. These may appear publicly on Search, Maps, and other Google services. [Learn more](#)

Has basketball court	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has business center	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	No
Has concierge	Yes	No
Has elevator	Yes	No
Has fitness center	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	No
Has gender-neutral restroom	Yes	No
Has golf simulator	Yes	No
Has hot tub	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Pets welcome	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	No
Has swimming pool	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	No



New GBP Attributes

PROPERTY



New, long awaited attributes for the Property Industry were recently added to GBP:

- Has in-unit washer/dryer
- Onsite maintenance
- Has outdoor space

Highlights: Outdoor Space · Maintenance

Business information

About Contact Location Hours **More**

Has gender-neutral restroom	Yes	No
Has golf simulator	Yes	No
Has hot tub	Yes	No
Has in-unit washer/dryer	Yes	No
Onsite maintenance	Yes	No
Has outdoor space	Yes	No
Pets welcome	Yes	No
Has swimming pool	Yes	No

Save Cancel

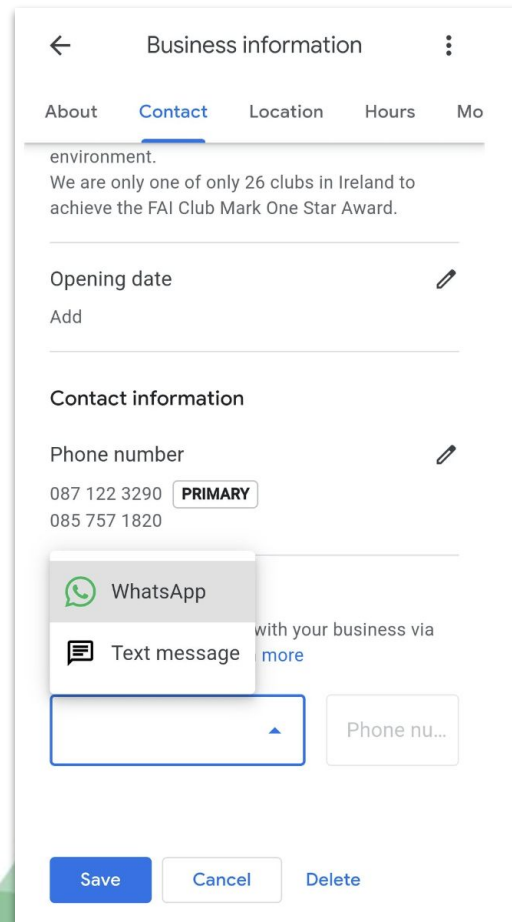


New GBP Feature

SMS & WhatsApp MESSAGING

It appears Google is replacing Google Chat with WhatsApp and SMS/Text Message integration.

Businesses can now add their phone numbers in a new "Chat" section and select whether to use WhatsApp or SMS. Consumers can then chat with your business through the phone number selected.





WhatsApp and SMS/Text Messaging

SETUP NOW AVAILABLE FOR SOME VIA API



Businesses wanting to add a Messaging CTA to their Google Business Profile so customers can reach out directly with questions can now add their WhatsApp and/or SMS/Text Messaging information via API.

Listings

Twitter

Youtube

Texting number

WhatsApp

Accessibility

Assistive hearing loop Yes No Unsure

Wheelchair accessible restroom Yes No Unsure

Wheelchair accessible seating Yes No Unsure

Parking

Free parking garage Yes No Unsure

Free parking lot Yes No Unsure



Caught in the Wild

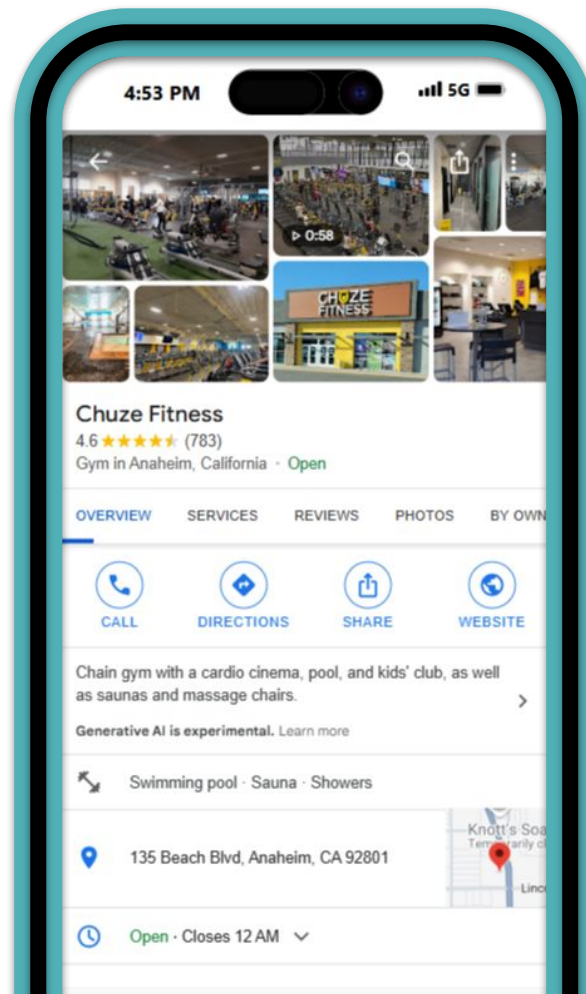
New features we've spied
in Local Search results



Caught in the Wild...

Google is beginning to highlight attributes for gym's prominently on the knowledge panel for some search results.

Recommendation: Make sure you have marked off all attributes that are applicable to your business.

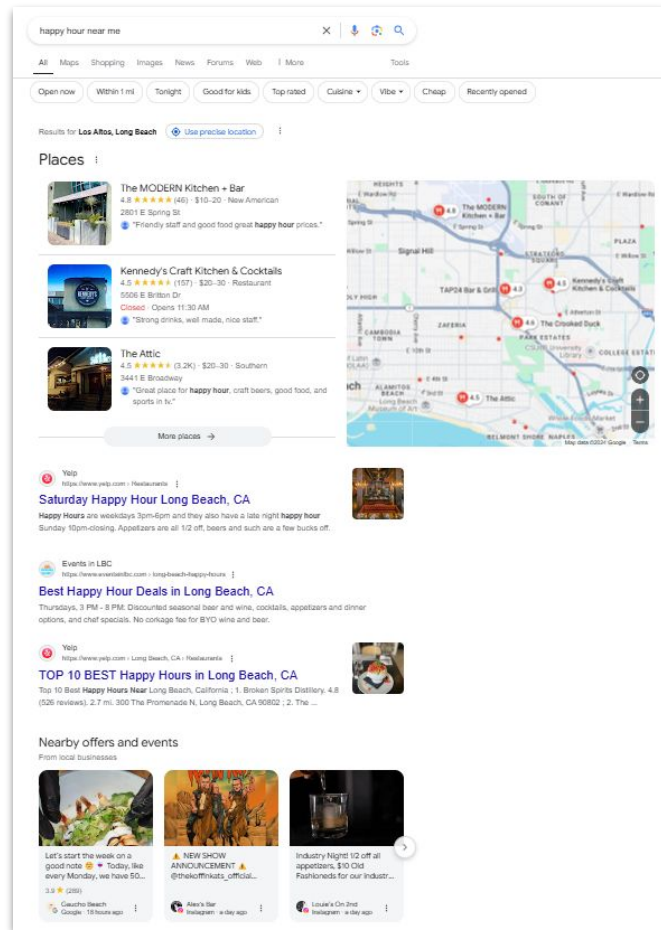




Caught in the Wild...

Nearby offers and events carousel beginning to appear in some desktop search results.

Recommendation: Publish ongoing offers at least once a week in one of your local social and/or search channels.



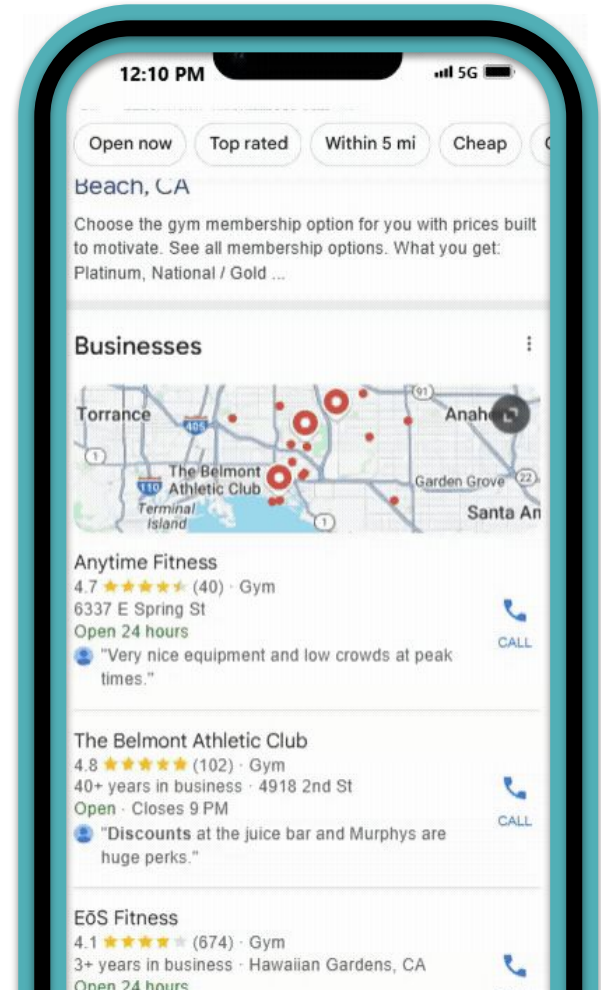


Caught in the Wild ...

I broke Google again.



SOC¹





Q&A



Thanks for Joining!

See you next year! :)