

The #1 Internet Marketing Strategy
Every Business Must Implement
Now

by Pamela Shannon

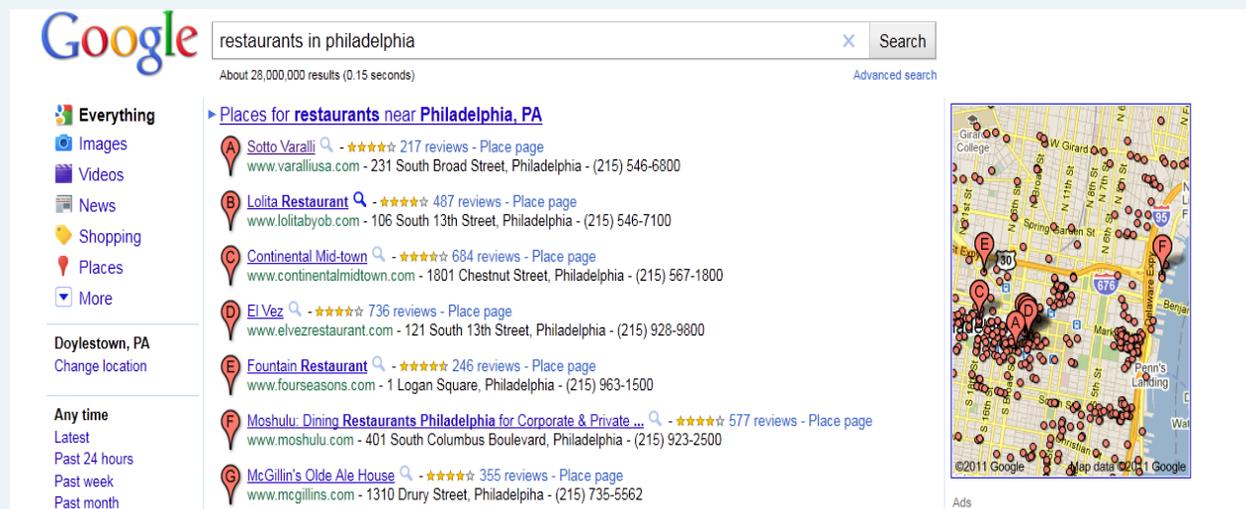
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A massive shift has taken place during the last couple of years, and your business needs to act quickly to take advantage of these changes. Over 82% of consumers now use the Internet to search for local products and services. Print media, like the Yellow Pages, is practically dead. Mobile devices – smartphones (Android, Blackberry, iPhone) and tablets (iPad, Zoom, Galaxy) – are rapidly becoming the way to access the Internet.

The bottom line is that in order to prosper in the new economy, your business must create a strong online presence. There are many possible ways to do this. In this special report, we will focus on a common and free strategy that’s available to every business on the planet* – Google Places.

If you’ve been on the internet at all, you’ve seen a Google Places listing. Formerly called “maps”, Places is actually a free web page for your business. It defines your location, products, services, contact information, driving directions, photos, videos and much more. The Places pages are displayed whenever someone searches Google for a particular category of business: restaurant, plumber, computer store, massage therapist, etc.

You can check this out by going to the Google search page (Google.com) and typing in “restaurants in cityname”, and you’ll see something like this for “restaurants in Philadelphia”:



The screenshot shows a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "restaurants in philadelphia" and a search button. Below the search bar, it indicates "About 28,000,000 results (0.15 seconds)" and an "Advanced search" link. The main content area displays a list of restaurant results under the heading "Places for restaurants near Philadelphia, PA". Each result includes a red location pin icon, the restaurant name, a star rating, the number of reviews, a link to the place page, and the address and phone number. The results listed are: Sotto Varalli (217 reviews), Lolita Restaurant (487 reviews), Continental Mid-town (684 reviews), El Vez (736 reviews), Fountain Restaurant (246 reviews), Moshulu: Dining Restaurants Philadelphia for Corporate & Private ... (577 reviews), and McGillin's Olde Ale House (355 reviews). To the right of the list is a map of Philadelphia with numerous red location pins indicating the locations of the restaurants. The map shows major streets like Market St, Center City, and the University Expressway. The bottom of the map area has a copyright notice for 2011 Google.

On a search page, there are usually 7 “spots” allocated for Places listings. This means that for any given location, only 7 lucky businesses will be displayed for each category. Currently, they are given a special red push-pin graphic and lettered A-G. The remaining businesses in the category are relegated to a page called “more results”, so the searcher has to go looking for anything past the first 7.

Most people focus on the page one results – so that’s where you want to be. This means that you need to *make sure* your business is listed in Places ... before the 7 spots are all filled! If you haven’t created, or “claimed” your business listing, go immediately and do that: www.google.com/places/.

Follow the instructions, and be sure to fill in every possible piece of information. You’ll need a Gmail account. Post photos and videos, hours of operation, etc. Google has pre-populated some business listings, so you may find you already have a listing. If so, make sure you claim it, and verify that you are the owner. That way you can update it when necessary, and keep track of your statistics.

When you save the listing, Google will want to verify that you are a real business before they will publish it. Usually they will send a postcard in the mail to your business address. Sometimes they allow phone verification, so if you’re able to answer your business line when you save the listing, that’s the fastest method.

Here are some tips for creating an effective Places page:

- Use a local address - PO boxes are not allowed. If you work from home, you can select the checkbox to hide the street address.
- Use a local phone number - 800 numbers can be listed as a secondary number
- Fill-in all 5 categories - select the best categories from the drop-down list. Then create custom categories that make sense for your business. Check your competitor’s pages for suggestions!
- Enter your website - if you don’t have a dedicated website, create one on Wordpress.com for free.
- Create a short description of your business; make it count.
- Upload photos and videos - if you don’t have videos, search YouTube.com for videos you can link to (NOT competitors).

- Try to find vendor's videos for products you sell, demonstrations, anything that informs or entertains prospects related to your business. Copy the YouTube web address link into the Place page. This is simple, and makes your listing really stand out. To create your own videos, use a free service like Animoto.com to make a slideshow highlighting your product or service. Easy, but also fun!

If the 7 spots for your category are already filled, don't worry. There are specific actions you can take to try to get a better placement for your listing. You'll notice that many Places pages have reviews and starred ratings. Google gathers information about your business from other sites around the Internet. Some of these sites are directory listings, and they are known as citations. You'll need to devote some time and energy to making sure your business is correctly listed on these sites. The listings are free.

Here are a few popular citation sites: Yelp.com, Superpages.com, Yellowpages.com, InfoUSA.com, InsiderPages.com, MerchantCircle.com. There are also sites that are local to your city or region. You can search Google for them, or check out where the reviews are coming from on your competitors Place page ... and other Place pages in your city.

For instance, there is a popular site in Doylestown PA, where my business is located, called Bucks County Alive. They offer a free business directory, and a listing there helps my business be found online in my county, as well as the city. Check around on the Internet for local sites where you're allowed to list for free – and don't forget about the chamber of commerce and other organizations or associations in your area.

Once you've gotten some citations done, and your Place page has been published, you should begin getting reviews of your business posted. Your listing may be buried deep in the pile, but a search for the business name should bring it up. Ask your best customers if they will take a couple of minutes to go online and write some nice comments about you. Reviews can be posted by anyone with a Google account, or on any of the citation sites or local review sites.

Check your competitor's page to see where their reviews are coming from. Also check other similar businesses in your area to find out what the possibilities are. Reviews are becoming hugely valuable to your online presence, and they will boost your position in the search results. Now is the time to develop a strategy to manage reviews – both getting them and responding to them.

It goes without saying ... never fake reviews! You are not allowed to post reviews of your own business, and if you are caught doing this, you could be banned entirely. Just ask your customers for their help, and/or post a small sign or request in your business letting customers know you'd appreciate a review. Also, let them know which websites they can visit to post reviews. If you get a bad review, most sites allow you to post a response. Be calm and tactful, and try to defuse the situation and make things right.

Now that your listing has traction, you can begin the monitoring and tracking phase. You'll need to keep an eye on your "position" so that you can track if you're moving up in the search results. Once you're on top, keep monitoring so that you don't fall behind. Things change fast on the web, and others will be vying for those coveted top spots!

You can easily track your Place page by using the dashboard in your Google account. You'll be able to see how many people saw your listing (impressions) and how many clicked on your website link, got directions, etc. Check your statistics at least monthly. Continue adding citations and getting reviews. Also, go create your listing on Yahoo.com and Bing.com. The more, the merrier!

For more information, visit www.KGMStrategy.com -- or call us for a complimentary strategy planning session at 610-400-1840.

* As of this writing, certain categories of businesses are excluded by Google from the Places results. Internet marketing companies, SEO companies, and web designers are some of the unlucky categories.