

Go Organic

What you need to know to show up in Google search results.

BY STACEY E. BURKE

As we all know, Google matters a lot, but it can be hard to understand its never-ending intricacies, particularly because Google is continually evolving and changing. To get your law firm to show up in as many organic Google search results as possible, you need to have a basic understanding of Google's business platforms.

To achieve digital marketing success by leveraging a location-based strategy, most seasoned search engine optimization, or SEO, professionals start at the same place: creating a Google My Business Listing. Google Places for Business and the Google+ Dashboard used to be the best way to manage your business information, but both are now part of Google's universal platform, Google My Business.

What Is Google My Business?

In June 2014, Google introduced Google My Business, or GMB, a free tool that lets companies create and manage their online presence across Google properties, including Maps and Search. GMB replaced Google+ Local and Google Places for Business. Google My Business gives your law firm a public identity and presence with a listing on Google, the most popular search engine in the world. The information you provide about your firm can appear in Google Search, Google Maps, and on Google+. GMB is more of an SEO feature, while Google+ is more of a social media feature, although both impact SEO.

Google My Business helps connect your law firm to potential clients looking for your services through Insights, Maps, Search, Google+, Analytics, and AdWords Express. GMB is now a de facto online dashboard for your law firm, showing you all of the different channels that define your law firm's success on Google, including helping list your business on Search and Maps and ensuring all business information is consistent across Google

results. This provides law firms and other local businesses with one central stop to hit for managing all Google accounts. In other words, GMB is the interface between your law firm and Google local search activity and helps your company come up when potential customers search on Google.

Checklist for Optimizing Google My Business:

- Use your real business name
- Confirm your address is correct and consistent
- Make sure to use a local phone number
- List a category, but you can list multiple categories
- List your normal business hours, and if your hours change, go back and correct them manually
- Provide a detailed and thorough introduction about your business
- Include photos:
 - ◆ Identity photos: A profile photo, a logo photo, and a cover photo
 - ◆ Interior photos
 - ◆ Exterior photo
 - ◆ Photos at work
 - ◆ Team photos
 - ◆ Additional photos

What Is Google+?

Google+ is Google's intended social media response to Facebook. Instead of focusing on individual profiles, Google+ focuses on Communities and Collections. Communities are public or private groups for people with a common interest. Communities are a great way to build buzz around a topic and actively engage with an audience, whether it's through comments or hangouts. Collections are posts grouped by content. This works slightly like Pinterest, in that people find pages of their interest with different posts from different sources.

Google+ is just one aspect of Google My Business—it is Google's social network. Having a Google+ account used to be a requirement to create a GMB listing, but now it's just another feature of the

“Dashboard.” While Google+ is its own thing, GMB allows you to link your accounts together. Many businesses only utilize GMB and choose not to invest time in a Google+ page. However, as the social media platform of the largest search engine in the world, an active Google+ account can greatly improve your firm's SEO value.

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There are many important factors to making the most of your Google presence, but two stand out as both the most important and the most often overlooked:

1. *Mind the NAP.* Your website and your Google+ must show the exact same information as what you entered in your Google My Business page. You might think that as long as your GMB listing is updated, people will have the right information to reach out to you. Well, Google doesn't like contradictions. It will try to make your information match what is on your website to avoid customer confusion, but this may not be the information you want your visitors to see. So, when you update a piece of information, do it across all your media. In addition, consistency across your online presence will help SEO value. If you spell out the word “street” in your address on your website, make sure you spell it out in your GMB listing too.
2. *Get Good Reviews.* Reviews are powerful and make you stand out, so monitor them and respond to them when relevant. Connect with your audience and continue the conversation, especially when customers are willing to say good things about you. Positive reviews are also a signal to Google that a law firm and its website are credible, which will also help boost your organic search rankings. **TBJ**

This article was originally published on the Stacey E. Burke, P.C., blog. It has been edited and reprinted with permission.

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